

Esau

Did Not Consider The Consequences

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Overview

ESAU DID NOT ALWAYS CONSIDER THE CONSEQUENCE

Esau's story is told in Genesis 25-36. He is also mentioned in Malachi 1:2-3; Romans 9:13; Hebrews 12:16-17.

Common sense isn't all that common. In fact, the common thread in many decisions is that they don't make sense.

Esau's life was filled with choices he must have regretted bitterly.

He appears to have been a person who found it hard to consider consequences, reacting to the need of the moment without realizing what he was giving up to meet that need.

Trading his birthright for a bowl of stew was the clearest example of this weakness.

He also chose wives in direct opposition to his parents' wishes. He learned the hard way.

What are you willing to trade for the things you want? Do you find yourself, at times, willing to negotiate anything for what you feel you need now?

Esau was the older of the twin sons born to Isaac and Rebekah

Birth of Esau

Genesis 25:19-26

This is the history of the family of Isaac, the son of Abraham.

When Isaac was forty years old, he married Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean from Paddan-aram and the sister of Laban.

Isaac pleaded with the Lord to give Rebekah a child because she was childless. So the Lord answered Isaac's prayer, and his wife became pregnant with twins.

But the two children struggled with each other in her womb. So she went to ask the Lord about it. "Why is this happening to me?" she asked.

And the Lord told her, "The sons in your womb will become two rival nations. One nation will be stronger than the other; the descendants of your older son will serve the descendants of your younger son."

And when the time came, the twins were born. The first was very red at birth. He was covered with so much hair that one would think he was wearing a piece of clothing. So they called him Esau.

Then the other twin was born with his hand grasping Esau's heel. So they called him Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when the twins were born.

Isaac inherited everything from his father, including God's promise to make his descendants into a great nation. As a boy, Isaac did not resist as his father prepared to sacrifice him, and as a man, he gladly accepted the wife that others chose for him. Through Isaac, we learn how to let God guide our life and place his will ahead of our own.

As Isaac pleaded with God for children, so the Bible encourages us to ask and even plead for our most personal and important requests. God wants to grant our requests, but he wants us to ask him.

Even then, as Isaac learned, God may decide to withhold his answer for a while in order to (1) deepen our insight into what we really need, (2) broaden our appreciation for his answers, or (3) allow us to mature so we can use his gifts more wisely.

The sons of Isaac were Esau and Jacob

1 Chron. 1:34

Abraham was the father of Isaac. The sons of Isaac were Esau and Israel.

Israel is another name for Jacob because Jacob's 12 sons became the nation of Israel. Esau's descendants became the nation of Edom, a constant enemy of Israel. To learn more about the lives of Isaac and his two sons, Jacob and Esau, read their stories in Genesis 21-36 and Genesis 46-49. See Jacob's Profile and Esau's Profile for more information about their lives.

Esau was also called Edom

Genesis 36:1

This is the history of the descendants of Esau (also known as Edom).

Esau was a hunter

Genesis 25:27-28

As the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open fields, while Jacob was the kind of person who liked to stay at home.

Isaac loved Esau in particular because of the wild game he brought home, but Rebekah favored Jacob.

Esau sells his birthright for a single meal

Genesis 25:29-34

One day when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau arrived home exhausted and hungry from a hunt. Esau said to Jacob, "I'm starved! Give me some of that red stew you've made." (This was how Esau got his other name, Edom—"Red.")

Jacob replied, "All right, but trade me your birthright for it."

"Look, I'm dying of starvation!" said Esau. "What good is my birthright to me now?"

So Jacob insisted, "Well then, swear to me right now that it is mine." So Esau swore an oath, thereby selling all his rights as the firstborn to his younger brother. Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and lentil stew. Esau ate and drank and went on about his business, indifferent to the fact that he had given up his birthright.

A birthright was a special honor given to the firstborn son. It included a double portion of the family inheritance along with the honor of one day becoming the family's leader. The oldest son could sell his birthright or give it away if he chose, but in so doing, he would lose both material goods and his leadership position. By trading his birthright, Esau showed complete disregard for the spiritual blessings that would have come his way if he had kept it. In effect, Esau "despised" his birthright (Genesis 25:34).

Esau traded the lasting benefits of his birthright for the immediate pleasure of food. He acted on impulse, satisfying his immediate desires without pausing to consider the long-range consequences of what he was about to do. We can fall into the same trap. When we see something we want, our first impulse is to get it.

At first we feel intensely satisfied and sometimes even powerful because we have obtained what we set out to get. But immediate pleasure often loses sight of the future. We can avoid making Esau's mistake by comparing the short-term satisfaction with its long-range consequences before we act.

Esau exaggerated his hunger. "I am about to die," he said. This thought made his choice much easier because if he was starving, what good was an inheritance anyway? The pressure of the moment distorted his perspective and made his decision seem urgent.

We often experience similar pressures. For example, when we feel sexual pressure, a marriage vow may seem unimportant. We might feel such great pressure in one area that nothing else seems to matter and we lose our perspective. Getting through that short, pressure-filled moment is often the most difficult part of overcoming a temptation.

God loved Jacob, but rejected Esau

Romans 9:13

In the words of the Scriptures, "I loved Jacob, but I rejected Esau.

Was it right for God to choose Jacob, the younger, to be over Esau? In Malachi 1:2-3, the statement "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated" refers to the nations of Israel and Edom rather than to the individual brothers. God chose Jacob to continue the family line of the faithful because he knew his heart was for God. But he did not exclude Esau from knowing and loving him. Keep in mind the kind of God we worship: he is sovereign; he is not arbitrary; in all things he works for our good; he is trustworthy; he will save all who believe in him. When we understand these qualities of God, we know that his choices are good even if we don't understand all his reasons.

Esau an example of a godless person.

Hebrews 12:16

Make sure that no one is immoral or godless like Esau. He traded his birthright as the oldest son for a single meal.

Esau's story shows us that mistakes and sins sometimes have lasting consequences (Genesis 25:29-34; Genesis 27:36). Even repentance and forgiveness do not always eliminate sins consequences. How often do you make decisions based on what you want now, rather than on what you need in the long run? Evaluate the long-range effects of your decisions and actions.

Esau marries a Hittite woman

Genesis 26:34 -35

At the age of forty, Esau married a young woman named Judith, the daughter of Beeri the Hittite. He also married Basemath, the daughter of Elon the Hittite.

Esau's wives made life miserable for Isaac and Rebekah.

Esau married pagan women, and this upset his parents greatly. Most parents can be a storehouse of good advice, because they have a lifetime of insight into their children's character. You may not agree with everything your parents say, but at least talk with them and listen carefully. This will help avoid the hard feelings Esau experienced.

Esau is defrauded of his father's blessing by Jacob

Genesis 27:1-5

The promises of the Messiah, and of the land of Canaan, had come down to Isaac. Isaac being now about 135 years of age, and his sons about 75, and not duly considering the Divine word concerning his two sons, that the elder should serve the younger, resolved to put all the honour and power that were in the promise, upon Esau his eldest son.

We are very apt to take measures rather from our own reason than from Divine revelation, and thereby often miss our way.

Rebekah Teaches Jacob to Obtain the Blessing

Genesis 27:6-17

Rebekah knew that the blessing was intended for Jacob, and expected he would have it. But she wronged Isaac by putting a cheat on him; she wronged Jacob by tempting him to wickedness.

She put a stumbling-block in Esau's way, and gave him a pretext for hatred to Jacob and to religion. All were to be blamed. It was one of those crooked measures often adopted to further the Divine promises; as if the end would justify, or excuse wrong means. Thus many have acted wrong, under the idea of being useful in promoting the cause of Christ.

The answer to all such things is that which God addressed to Abraham, I am God Almighty; walk before me and be thou perfect.

And it was a very rash speech of Rebekah, "Upon me be thy curse, my son." Christ has borne the curse of the law for all who take upon them the yoke of the command, the command of the gospel.

But it is too daring for any creature to say, upon me be thy curse.

Jacob, Pretending to Be Esau, Obtains the Blessing

Genesis 27:18-29

Jacob, with some difficulty, gained his point, and got the blessing. This blessing is in very general terms. No mention is made of the distinguishing mercies in the covenant with Abraham. This might be owing to Isaac having Esau in his mind, though it was Jacob who was before him.

He could not be ignorant how Esau had despised the best things. Moreover, his attachment to Esau, so as to disregard the mind of God, must have greatly weakened his own faith in these things. It might therefore be expected, that leanness would attend his blessing, agreeing with the state of his mind.

Isaac's Fear, Esau's Importunity

Genesis 27:30-40

When Esau understood that Jacob had got the blessing, he cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry.

The day is coming, when those that now make light of the blessings of the covenant, and sell their title to spiritual blessings for that which is of no value, will, in vain, ask urgently for them.

Isaac, when made sensible of the deceit practiced on him, trembled exceedingly. Those who follow the choice of their own affections, rather than the Divine will, get themselves into perplexity. But he soon recovers, and confirms the blessing he had given to Jacob, saying, I have blessed him, and he shall be blessed.

Those who part with their wisdom and grace, their faith and a good conscience, for the honours, wealth, or pleasures of this world, however they feign a zeal for the blessing, have judged themselves unworthy of it, and their doom shall be accordingly.

A common blessing was bestowed upon Esau. This he desired. Faint desires of happiness, without right choice of the end, and right use of the means, deceive many unto their own ruin. Multitudes go to hell with their mouths full of good wishes.

The great difference is, that there is nothing in Esau's blessing which points at Christ; and without that, the fatness of the earth, and the plunder of the field, will stand in little stead. Thus Isaac, by faith, blessed both his sons, according as their lot should be.

Esau Threatens Jacob's Life, Rebekah Sends Jacob Away

Genesis 27:41-46

Esau bore malice to Jacob on account of the blessing he had obtained. Thus he went in the way of Cain, who slew his brother, because he gained that acceptance with God of which he had rendered himself unworthy.

Esau aimed to prevent Jacob or his seed from having the dominion, by taking away his life. Men may fret at God's counsels, but cannot change them.

To prevent mischief, Rebekah warned Jacob of his danger, and advised him to withdraw for his safety. We must not presume too far upon the wisdom and resolution, even of the most hopeful and promising children; but care must be taken to keep them out of the way of evil.

When reading this chapter, we should not fail to observe, that we must not follow even the best of men further than they act according to the law of God. We must not do evil that good may come.

And though God overruled the bad actions recorded in this chapter, to fulfil his purposes, yet we see his judgment of them, in the painful consequences to all the parties concerned. It was the peculiar privilege and advantage of Jacob to convey these spiritual blessings to all nations.

The Christ, the Saviour of the world, was to be born of some one family; and Jacob's was preferred to Esau's, out of the good pleasure of Almighty God, who is certainly the best judge of what is fit, and has an undoubted right to dispense his favours as he sees proper, Rom 9:12-15.

Isaac blessed his two sons.

Hebrews 11:20

It was by faith that Isaac blessed his two sons, Jacob and Esau. He had confidence in what God was going to do in the future.

Isaac was the son who had been promised to Abraham and Sarah in their old age. It was through Isaac that God fulfilled his promise to eventually give Abraham countless descendants. Isaac had twin sons, Jacob and Esau. God chose the younger son, Jacob, through whom to continue the fulfillment of his promise to Abraham.

Esau meets Jacob on the return of the latter from Haran

Genesis 33:1

Then, in the distance, Jacob saw Esau coming with his four hundred men.

It is refreshing to see Esau's change of heart when the two brothers meet again. The bitterness over losing his birthright and blessing (Genesis 25:29-34) seems gone. Instead Esau was content with what he had. Jacob even exclaimed how great it was to see his brother obviously pleased with him (Genesis 33:10).

Life can bring us some bad situations. We can feel cheated, as Esau did, but we don't have to remain bitter. We can remove bitterness from our lives by honestly expressing our feelings to God, forgiving those who have wronged us, and being content with what we have.

Bowing to the ground seven times was the sign of respect given to a king. Jacob was taking every precaution as he met Esau, hoping to dispel any thoughts of revenge.

Esau greeted his brother, Jacob, with a great hug. Imagine how difficult this must have been for a man who once had actually plotted his brother's death (Genesis 27:41). But time away from each other allowed the bitter wounds to heal. With the passing of time, each brother was able to see that their relationship was more important than their real estate.

Why did Jacob send gifts ahead for Esau? In Bible times, gifts were given for several reasons. (1) This may have been a bribe. Gifts are still given to win someone over or buy his or her support. Esau may first have refused Jacob's gifts (Genesis 33:9) because he didn't want or need a bribe.

He had already forgiven Jacob, and he had ample wealth of his own. (2) This may have been an expression of affection. (3) It may have been the customary way of greeting someone before an important meeting. Such gifts were often related to a person's occupation. This explains why Jacob sent Esau—who was a herdsman—sheep, goats, and cattle.

Esau with Jacob buries his father

Gen 35:29

And he died at a ripe old age, joining his ancestors in death. Then his sons, Esau and Jacob, buried him.

Descendants of Esau

Gen 36

The registers in this chapter show the faithfulness of God to his promise to Abraham.

Esau is here called Edom, that name which kept up the remembrance of his selling his birth-right for a mess of pottage.

Esau continued the same profane despiser of heavenly things. In outward prosperity and honour, the children of the covenant are often behind, and those that are out of the covenant get the start.

We may suppose it a trial to the faith of God's Israel, to hear of the pomp and power of the kings of Edom, while they were bond-slaves in Egypt; but those that look for great things from God, must be content to wait for them; God's time is the best time.

Mount Seir is called the land of their possession. Canaan was at this time only the land of promise. Seir was in the possession of the Edomites.

Hostility of descendants of, toward the descendants of Jacob

Obadiah 1:10-14

"And why? Because of the violence you did to your close relatives in Israel. Now you will be destroyed completely and filled with shame forever.

For you deserted your relatives in Israel during their time of greatest need. You stood aloof, refusing to lift a finger to help when foreign invaders carried off their wealth and cast lots to divide up Jerusalem. You acted as though you were one of Israel's enemies.

"You shouldn't have done this! You shouldn't have gloated when they exiled your relatives to distant lands. You shouldn't have rejoiced because they were suffering such misfortune. You shouldn't have crowed over them as they suffered these disasters.

You shouldn't have plundered the land of Israel when they were suffering such calamity. You shouldn't have gloated over the destruction of your relatives, looting their homes and making yourselves rich at their expense.

You shouldn't have stood at the crossroads, killing those who tried to escape. You shouldn't have captured the survivors, handing them over to their enemies in that terrible time of trouble.

The Israelites had descended from Jacob, and the Edomites, from his brother, Esau (Genesis 25:19-26). Instead of helping Israel and Judah when they were in need, Edom allowed them to be destroyed and even plundered what was left behind. Edom, therefore, acted like a stranger, and it would be punished.

Anyone who does not help God's people is God's enemy. If you have withheld your help from someone in a time of need, this is sin (James 4:17). Sin includes not only what we do, but also what we refuse to do.

Don't ignore or refuse to help those in need.

Ancestor of Edomites

Jeremiah 49:8

Turn and flee! Hide in deep caves, you people of Dedan! For when I bring disaster on Edom, I will punish you, too!

Because the Israelites descended from Jacob and the Edomites from his twin brother, Esau, both nations descended from their father, Isaac. There was constant conflict between these nations, and Edom rejoiced at the fall of Jerusalem (see the book of Obadiah). Teman, a town in the northern part of Edom, was known for its wisdom and was the hometown of Eliphaz, one of Job's friends (Job 2:11). But even the wisdom of Teman could not save Edom from God's wrath.

Dedan was a flourishing city that supported caravan travel. God told its inhabitants to flee to the caves or they would also be destroyed. Teman and Dedan were at opposite ends of the country, so this shows the completeness of God's destruction of Edom. Bozrah (Jeremiah 49:13) is a town in northern Edom.

Prophecies concerning Esau

Obadiah 1:18

At that time Israel will be a raging fire, and Edom, a field of dry stubble. The fire will roar across the field, devouring everything and leaving no survivors in Edom. I, the Lord, have spoken!

The Edomites were routed by Judas Maccabeus in 164 B.C. The nation no longer existed by the first century A.D. At the time of Obadiah's prophecy, Edom may have seemed more likely to survive than Judah. Yet Edom has vanished, and Judah still exists. This demonstrates the absolute certainty of God's word and of the punishment awaiting all who have mistreated God's people.

The Negev was the southern part of Judah, a dry, hot region. The foothills were in the western part of Judah.

The boundaries of the kingdom would be extended to include the Canaanites (Phoenicians) as far south as Zarephath, located between Tyre and Sidon on the Mediterranean coast. Sepharad was most likely the city of Sardis.

Obadiah brought God's message of judgment on Edom. God was displeased with both their inward and their outward rebellion. People today are much the same as people in Obadiah's time, filled with arrogance, envy, and dishonesty. We may wonder where it will all end. Regardless of sin's effects, however, God is in control. Don't despair or give up hope. Know that when all is said and done, the Lord will still be King, and the confidence you place in him will not be in vain.

Edom is an example to all the nations that are hostile to God. Nothing can break God's promise to protect his people from complete destruction. In the book of Obadiah we see four aspects of God's message of judgment: (1) evil will certainly be punished; (2) those faithful to God have hope for a new future; (3) God is sovereign in human history; (4) God's ultimate purpose is to establish his eternal kingdom. The Edomites had been cruel to God's people. They were arrogant and proud, and they took advantage of others' misfortunes.

Any nation that mistreats people who obey God will be punished, regardless of how invincible they appear. Similarly we, as individuals, cannot allow ourselves to feel so comfortable with our wealth or security that we fail to help God's people. This is sin. And because God is just, sin will be punished.

Key verse:

“Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.

See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son.

Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. He could bring about no change of mind, though he sought the blessing with tears” (Hebrews 12:14-17)

Life Application

Do you sometimes feel that the important parts of life escaped while you were grabbing for something else?

If so, your initial response, like Esau's, may be deep anger. In itself that isn't wrong, as long as you direct the energy of that anger toward a solution and not toward yourself or others as the cause of the problem.

Your greatest need is to find a focal point other than “what I need now.” The only worthy focal point is God.

A relationship with him will not only give an ultimate purpose to your life; it will also be a daily guideline for living. Meet him in the pages of the Bible.

To ask Jesus to come into your heart please pray this Prayer:

Dear Lord Jesus, I believe you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. I ask you to forgive me of my sins and coming into my heart. I accept you as savior and will follow you as Lord. Amen.

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