

JACOB AND ESAU BY DAVID MATTINGLY

Jacob and Esau were twins born to Isaac and Rebekah. The Bible provides three major portions of scripture concerning them. The first is found in the historical record. The second is found in the prophetic record. The third is found in the doctrinal record. It is necessary to study all three of these records and to integrate them in order to have a comprehensive understanding about what is taught about these two men.

The Historical Record

The book of *Genesis* gets its name from “the book of the generation.” It provides an account of the beginning of God’s creation, of the early history of mankind, including his fall and further corruptions, of the two ancestral lines that sprang from Adam, of the repopulating of the earth after the flood, and of the development of nations from certain named patriarchs, including the nation of Israel that had its origins in Abraham.

Abraham was originally called Abram, a word meaning “high father.” Among the various promises God made to him was that He would make of him “a great nation” (Genesis 12.2). However, later this promise was to exist side by side with another stating he would be “a father of many nations” and his name was changed to Abraham, for said the Lord, “for a father of many nations have I made thee. And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee” (Genesis 17.4-6). His new name means “a father of a multitude.” Indeed,

he became the patriarch of nations. Through Sarah's maid he fathered Ishmael, the father of an Arabian people known as Ishmeelites (Genesis 25.12-18, 37.25 & 27-28). Through Keturah Abraham had a son, Midian, who became the father of the Midianites (Genesis 25.1-2; Judges 6.1-3). So, Abraham became the building block of nations. However, the promise given to Abraham as the father of many nations was separate from the promise given to him as the father of "a great nation." When the Lord told him to leave Ur of the Chaldees and go to a land God would show him he was promised his offspring would make up this great nation, that they would possession the land where Abraham was led, and that in him all families of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 11.31, 12.1-3, 13.14-17, & 15.18).

The account of how God fulfilled this promise is well known. Sarah, in old age gave birth to a son, Isaac. The Lord appeared to him and passed upon him the promise about his seed becoming this great nation. He married Rebekah (Genesis 25.20) and after about nineteen years she conceived. This brings us to the historical record concerning Jacob and Esau and here is the account given to us in scripture: "And Isaac intreated the LORD for his wife, because she *was* barren: and the LORD was intreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived. And the children struggled together within her; and she said, If *it be* so, why *am* I thus? And she went to enquire of the LORD" (Genesis 25.21-22). God answered Rebekah's inquiry: "And the LORD said unto her, Two nations *are* in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and *the one* people shall be stronger than *the other* people; and the elder shall serve the younger" (Genesis 25.23). Mark the fact Rebekah not only had conceived twins but each one represented and was to become a patriarch of a separate nation. One would be stronger than the other and the one born first would serve the other.

We need to pause here to see the importance of what is said in this text. During this time in human history a special status was given to the firstborn male. This is illustrated in Jacob's remarks when he gathered together his sons shortly before he died. He said: "Reuben, thou *art* my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power." Being the firstborn male established him as the family's inherited lord and the one who gained the greatest of his father's wealth, and although he did not speak well of Reuben, he did acknowledge his special place as the firstborn (Genesis 49.3-4). This recognized birthright to the firstborn male was incorporated into the Mosaic Law many years later. Even if a man who had two wives, one beloved and the other hated, if the hated wife was the one who gave the man his first male child, he was required to give "a double portion of all that he hath" to the firstborn, for, stated the scripture, "he *is* the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn *is* his" (Deuteronomy 21.15-17). Based upon all that was recognized by both custom and law one would think all the privileges of firstborn status would fall to Isaac's eldest twin. However, God told Rebekah the opposite would be the case. The second born would be served by the eldest.

Before examining the fact two separate nations were represented in Rebekah's womb let's look individually at these twins. The Bible states: "And when her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, *there were* twins in her womb. And the first came out red, all over like an hairy garment; and they called his name Esau. And after that came his brother out, and his hand took hold on Esau's heel; and his name was called Jacob: and Isaac was threescore years old when she bare them. And the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob *was* a plain man, dwelling in tents. And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of *his* venison: but Rebekah loved Jacob" (Genesis 25.24-28).

As they were so unlike it would be hard to imagine these were identical twins. For his part Esau was hairy from birth, reddish possibly in both hair and skin complexion. As he grew Isaac favored him. He was an outdoorsman, the “cunning hunter, a man of the field.” For Jacob’s part he was not hairy. His body was smooth (Genesis 27.11). One would not so readily feel the hairs on his body. He was a “mama’s boy.” He was referred to as a “plain man.” This is the only time our English translators render this Hebrew word this way. In other passages it is translated “perfect” (9 times), “undefiled” (twice), and “upright” (once) but it is understandable why they did not choose any of these words in this case as his character hardly fit such descriptions. What was probably depicted is that his character was gentle unlike his brother. He stayed around the house, or if you will, he was one “dwelling in tents.” He spent time in the kitchen. That’s probably why his mother thought so much of him. The root meaning of his name is “seize by the heel.” The word came to mean “a supplanter.” In either case the name fits him well. By holding on to Esau’s heel during birth he identified with his name (see also Hosea 12.3) and by taking from Esau that which was assumed to be his as the firstborn son he indeed was one who supplanted (Genesis 27.36).

The struggling Rebekah experienced in her womb before they were born was a struggle for dominance from birth and beyond. Since the account how Jacob came to possess the birthright and his father’s blessing is generally known I will pass quickly by it. Esau thought so little of his birthright he was willing to sell it to his brother for something to eat and Jacob was opportunistic enough to take him up on the deal. Then, when Isaac was old and nearly blind, he was ready to give his blessing to his oldest son but Rebekah and Jacob conspired to deceive him by having Jacob appear before his father instead. Since he could not see he gave this blessing to him thinking he was giving it to Esau. Here is the blessing: “God give thee of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of

the earth, and plenty of corn and wine: Let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee: be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee: cursed *be* every one that curseth thee, and blessed *be* he that blesseth thee" (Genesis 27.28-29). This blessing had so much substance to it that had Esau been its recipient one surely would have to conclude it would have countered the birthright Esau forfeited. As it turned out Esau, the stronger of the two, indeed became a servant to the younger.

It is understandable that Esau did not like what was done to him and he threatened to kill Jacob and Jacob fled to the place of his mother's nativity. While traveling there the Lord appeared unto him in a visionary dream at a place Jacob named Bethel. Here is the most pertinent part of this dream: "And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And, behold, the LORD stood above it, and said, I *am* the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And, behold, I *am* with thee, and will keep thee in all *places* whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done *that* which I have spoken to thee of" (Genesis 28.12-15). In short, God pass on to him the same covenant blessings given to Abraham and Isaac. Jacob completed his journey and remained twenty years with Laban, his mother's brother. There, he served Laban by tending to the flock and while there he was given two wives, he raised a family, and he became a prosperous man himself.

Meanwhile, Isaac did give a blessing to Esau; howbeit it was not as great as what was given to his brother: "Behold, thy dwelling shall be the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above:

And by thy sword shalt thou live, and shalt serve thy brother; and it shall come to pass when thou shalt have dominion, that thou shalt break his yoke from off thy neck” (Genesis 27.39-40). Although he was told there would be times when he would have dominion and break his brother’s rule he was still told he would serve his brother.

After marrying two Hittite women (Genesis 26.34-35), he went to “Ishmael, and took unto the wives which he had Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael Abraham’s son, the sister of Nebajoth, to be his wife” (Genesis 28.9). So, at least he finally married into a tribe that sprang from his grandfather. However, it should be remembered Ishmael had been banished from the land of promised. For his part, Esau settled in the land of Seir (Genesis 32.3), a land to the south of Israel’s possessions.

After twenty years with Laban the Lord told Jacob to return to Canaan so he took his family and possessions and headed back to the place of his birth. Since he had left the land in the first place due to his brother’s threat his fears became great when he received word Esau was coming to meet him with four hundred men. It was at that time that he had a very remarkable experience. The night before the two were to come together again while he was alone he wrestled with a man and he told the man he would not let him go unless he blessed him. This man was also referred to as an angel in Hosea 12.4, and from the context of Genesis 32.24-32 it appears to be none other than the Lord Himself in human form. Jacob was blessed and He with whom he wrestled gave him a name change: “Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed” (Genesis 32.28). Probably the best rendering of his new name is “a prince of God.” I know of no one who would belittle God to the point where he would hold that by prevailing it meant he was stronger than God but again Hosea gives the sense in which he prevailed with God: “He took his brother by the heel in the womb,

and by his strength he had power with God: Yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed: he wept, and made supplication unto him” (Hosea 12.3-4). In short, the Lord heard his pleas and may the Lord enable all His saints to prevail in like fashion as they come before His throne of grace with tears to plead their own cause! God hearing his plea is the sense in which he prevailed with Him.

When it was morning Esau came with his four hundred men to meet him. Twenty years must have been enough to subdue his anger for the scripture states: “Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him: and they wept” (Genesis 33.4). Thus, the two were reconciled. Jacob stayed in the land of Canaan until his whole family moved to Egypt in the days of the famine and Esau returned to Seir (Genesis 33.16). They met once more to bury Isaac when he died (Genesis 35.29).

I shall now take leave of dealing with these twins as individuals and I will start looking at them as heads of their respective nations.

Through Jacob’s offspring came the great nation promised to Abraham and Isaac that would possess the land of Canaan and through whom all the families of the earth would be blessed. Jacob’s twelve sons and their descendents became the building blocks of the nation known as Israel. Through his son, Levi, the priesthood was established. Ten of his other sons inherited land in Canaan, and Joseph had land, not in his name, but in the name of his two sons. The greater part of the Old Testament provides us with a historical record of this great nation. The New Testament provides us with a historical record of Jesus Christ, the one through whom all the families of the earth were blessed.

Esau’s name played only a minor role in Old Testament history. He was the patriarch of Edom, or if you will the people known as the Edomites whose central site was in Mt. Seir (Genesis 36.8-9).

These people bore several marks that had characterized the man, Esau. As the color red and hairiness were physical features of Esau it is interesting to note there was a ruddy hue cast from the mountain of Seir and as Esau's hair made his body rough to the touch so most of the land he inherited was rugged. However, there were parts of it good enough so that the blessing Isaac gave him: "thy dwelling shall be the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven" (Genesis 27.39) proved to characterize what the Edomites inherited. More can be found about Esau's offspring possessing this land by examining Deuteronomy 2.4-5, 8, 12, 22, 29; and Joshua 24.4). From Deuteronomy 2.12 and 22 it is clear the Edomites were an invading people who drove out those who had occupied the land before and so we can also see the beginning of Isaac's blessing fulfilled in his seed: "by thy sword shalt thou live" (Genesis 27.40). Esau had fathered a nation of conquerors. So, the people and the land had much in common with their patriarch.

The struggles for dominance and the conflicts of these twins were also evident in the Old Testament histories of their two nations. After Joseph's death it appeared Edom had the easiest time of the two. Esau's genealogy recorded in Genesis, chapter 36 showed them well established in their land with their many rulers (dukes) while the Israelites became slaves in Egypt. Things did not start to turn around until God delivered Israel from Egypt. However, as Israel was becoming a mighty nation conflicts surfaced between these two people. While Israel was still in the wilderness and sought passage through Edom the Edomites refused the request and threatened Israel with war (Numbers 20.17-21) and since Israel was around the borders of Moab at that time the Moabite king tried to get Balaam to use his skills to curse Israel. However, much to his sorrow he ended up blessing Israel instead and part of the blessing Balaam gave proved unfavorable to Edom: "And Edom shall be a possession, Seir also shall be a possession for his enemies; and Israel shall do valiantly" (Numbers 24.18). Indeed, the future became brighter for Israel as the dominant power of the

two but Edom remained a troublesome enemy to Israel as seen in events that followed. A defeated Edom became servants to Israel during David's reign (II Samuel 8.14) fulfilling through nation status at this time the Lord's words that the elder would serve the younger. However, an Edomite named Hadad became a troublesome source during Solomon's reign (I Kings 11.14-22). The back and forth continued: Edom revolted against Joram, king of Judah (II Kings 8.20-22), another king of Judah, Amaziah, defeated Edom (II Kings 14.7 & 10), and Ahaz, the king of Judah required help from Assyria to put down Edom (II Chronicles 28.16-17). Psalm 83 spoke of a time when Edom was allied with other nations to try to destroy Israel (verses 1-8).

Before leaving the historical record one more point should be made. Not only did the Lord tell Rebekah that she was carrying two nations in her womb she also was told she was carrying "two manner of people" (Genesis 25.23). Jacob knew the Lord. God had appeared to him first at Bethel (Genesis 28.10-22) and later when he was returning to the land of Canaan (Genesis 32.24-32). There is no evidence God ever appeared to Esau. The distinction between the two in this regard is strikingly evident in the conversation between them when Jacob returned from his twenty years of exile. Jacob's speech was seasoned with words acknowledging God as the source of his many blessings, telling Esau that those with him were "The children which God hath graciously given thy servant" and then later he said "God hath dealt graciously with me (Genesis 33.5 & 11). God had been good as far as this world's goods are concerned to Esau as well but his accounting how he fared was void of any mention of God. He simply said, "I have enough" (Genesis 33.9). As with the two patriarchs so was it with their respective nations. The Edomites were idolaters (II Chronicles 25.14 & 20). Their worship was void of knowledge of the true God but unlike them Jacob's offspring received the oracles of God (Romans 3.1-2). Throughout Old Testament history they always had the law and the prophets, and

although there were many times when idolatry abounded among them God never left them in total blindness but always gave them a remnant that worshipped the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Isaiah 1.9; I Kings 19.18).

With this we pass from the historical record to the prophetic record.

The Prophetic Record

Follow the words of the last Old Testament prophet: “The burden of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi. I have loved you, saith the LORD. Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us? Was not Esau Jacob’s brother? Saith the LORD; yet I loved Jacob, And I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness. Whereas Edom saith, We are impoverished, but we will return and build the desolate places; thus saith the LORD of hosts, They shall build, but I will throw down; and they shall call them, The border of wickedness, and, The people against whom the LORD hath indignation for ever” (Malachi 1.1-4).

From verse 1 it is clear the words were written to Israel concerning both patriarchal twins. Yet, their names were brought up, not to deal with them as individuals, but to deal with them as heads of their respective nations. The language is in line with what Old Testament scripture teaches about Israel identified in the patriarchal head, Jacob, and Edom identified in the patriarchal head, Esau. However, there is in this language something new. The Lord said: “I loved Jacob,” and to his descendents He declared: “I have loved you.” Although God’s dealing with Jacob might suggest He loved the man, Jacob, nevertheless He had never gone on record saying that. However, He had gone on record before to declare His love for the nation. In Moses’ day He told the people: “For thou *art* an holy people unto the LORD thy God:

the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that *are* upon the face of the earth. The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye *were* the fewest of all people: But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, {that would be Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob} hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt” (Deuteronomy 7.6-8). It may also be suggested from the historical record that God did not favor Esau but it was not until Malachi that He went on record and declared, “I hated Esau,” and from what follows it is plain His hatred continued toward the people of Edom.

The words concerning God’s hatred of Esau has provoked many folk to try to minimize the force of the words by accenting what has already been shown to be true; that is, Malachi’s use of Esau’s name is actually referring to Edom. However, how does making this point make God’s hatred any easier for them to handle? If anything it should increase their problem. If they cannot handle God’s hatred for one man how can they deal with His hatred toward his whole offspring? They were: “people against whom the LORD hath indignation for ever” (verse 4). He hated a whole nation of people and they, as other Gentiles, were left in their idolatrous ways without any heavenly guidance at all. To the Hebrews God gave the Law and the prophets. To the Edomites He gave neither. From the context we see while they recognized their impoverished condition they determined they would rebuild their desolate places, but God responded with judgment. He would destroy what they rebuild. So, where is it shown that He loved the Edomites? And if He did not love the Edomites would we expect Him to love their patriarch?

Other prophets also foretold God’s judgment upon Edom, and cited specifically the evil the people did to Jacob’s descendents as the

basis for His judgment. The whole prophecy of Obadiah is directed against Edom (verse 1). The Lord made the nation small among the heathens and greatly despised (verse 2), and although the people felt their mountains would protect them the Lord declared He would bring them down and the nations that they allied with would be of no help to them (verses 3-9). Their participation in the violence against the Jews in the days of Judah's captivity is specifically mentioned as the reason for judgment against them and the Lord declared they would "be cut off for ever" and "there shall not be *any* remaining of the house of Esau" (verses 10-18, particularly verses 10 & 18). Overlapping verses 17-18 and then through the end of the prophecy the Lord declares how His people will completely have the dominion over the Edomites.

Consistent with the prophecies of both Malachi and Obadiah one might also want to read Jeremiah 49.7-22, Ezekiel 25.12-14, Joel 3.19, and Amos 1.11-12.

Having noted all of these judgments against Esau's seed let me give the reader something to ponder. When Obadiah 17-18 spoke of the Lord's people having complete dominance over the Edomites, is it possible to interpret these words not only in a military and political sense but also in a more spiritual sense looking ahead to the gospel age when the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob fulfill the promise through Christ of being a blessing to all the earth's families. Remember, the four creatures and twenty-four elders' praised the Lamb of God: "Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation: And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth" (Revelation 5.8-10). Might we not consider in the light of these words that even among such a people who generally received nothing but God's wrath, a tiny remnant were a part of the covenant God made with Abraham

wherein all the families of the earth would be blessed? Also, I cite Amos 9.11-12 and the application given to it in the New Testament. The prophecy states: “In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: That they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name, saith the LORD that doeth this.” Now, from this language one can say that it foretells a time again when in a political and military way Edom and other Gentiles are subdued by the Jews. But James cited these words using the Septuagint Version when he addressed the Church in support of the view that Gentiles were also to be included in the blessings of the gospel. Here is how the language is found in Acts 15.16-17: “ AFTER THIS I WILL RETURN, AND WILL BUILD AGAIN THE TABERNACLE OF DAVID, WHICH IS FALLEN DOWN; AND I WILL BUILD AGAIN THE RUINS THEREOF, AND I WILL SET IT UP: THAT THE RESIDUE OF MEN MIGHT SEEK AFTER THE LORD, AND ALL THE GENTILES, UPON WHOM MY NAME IS CALLED, SAITH THE LORD, WHO DOETH ALL THESE THINGS.” In the New Testament the words are given a more spiritual sense. No specific mention is made of Edom. This may not mean they were left out but by combining what is given to us in both the Old Testament passage as well as the New Testament passage one might gather that the Septuagint simply lumped them among the other Gentiles. Whereas “That they may possess the remnant of Edom” are the words in Amos the New Testament gives the meaning to be “that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called.” That is, it is a possession in a spiritual sense rather than a political and military sense. I note also that the land called Idumea in Christ’s time was the land of Edom and with this in mind I cite Mark 3.7-8: “But Jesus withdrew himself with his disciples to the sea: and a great multitude from Galilee followed him, and from Judaea, And from Jerusalem, and from Idumaea, and *from* beyond Jordan; and they about Tyre and

Sidon, a great multitude, when they had heard what great things he did, came unto him.” Perhaps, (and I emphasis perhaps) even in those times there were still a few of Esau’s seed left in the land that had been brought into the fold of Judaism and were then drawn to Christ.

I leave all of this pondering to the consideration of the reader and proceed to the doctrinal record.

The Doctrinal Record

The apostle Paul brought up the subject of Jacob and Esau in his letter to the Church at Rome. The full context will need to be examined but here is the portion dealing with these twins: “And not only *this*; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, *even* by our father Isaac; (For *the children* being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) It was said unto her, **THE ELDER SHALL SERVE THE YOUNGER. AS IT WRITTEN, JACOB HAVE I LOVED, BUT ESAU HAVE I HATED**” (Romans 9.10-13). Paul quoted from the two different Old Testament sources: the reference to the elder serving the younger taken from the historical (Genesis 25.23), and the reference to Jacob as the beloved and Esau as the hated taken from the prophetic (Malachi 1.2-3). However, he added something not given in Malachi. He said God loved Jacob and hated Esau before either were born or had done good or evil. There is a reason why the inspired writer made this point. He cited these twins to illustrate the biblical doctrine of God’s sovereign, unconditional election. Whereas the Old Testament had presented these men as patriarchal heads of their respective nations the apostle presented them as figures representing the elect and the rejected of mankind. These four verses are embedded in chapters dealing with the general Jewish blindness, with the remnant number of Jews that believed on Christ, with the many Gentiles that were being saved

by the Lord, and with the salvation that would come to many Jews in the latter days (chapters 9-11).

The beginning of each of chapters 9 and 10 reveals Paul's great sorrow for Israel's blind condition. Although he preached Christ to the Jews wherever he went Paul saw they were not in massive numbers coming to Jesus. Therefore, he wrote: "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh: Who are Israelites" (Romans 9.1-4). He further wrote: "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God" (Romans 10.1-3). Notwithstanding his sorrows and prayers for his fellow Jews chapter 9 provides an explanation why only a relatively small number of them were being saved. He came to grips with the fact God always had divided them between those who were truly Abraham's seed in the spiritual sense and those who were only of Abraham in the fleshly sense. Follow how he reasons this. He draws the distinction between the two by stating: "For they *are* not all Israel, which are of Israel: Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, *are they* all children" (verses 6-7). The fact Isaac, Abraham's son through Sarah, was the one through whom the covenant blessing came proved his point. Abraham had a son before Isaac, and sons later by Keturah. These sons were every bit as much Abraham's seed as was Isaac, but they were children of the flesh and not children of God (verse 7-9). The twins also proved the same truth. Jacob, the younger of the two, was the one God loved and called. Esau, the elder, was hated. By bringing up these twins the inspired writer gave the reason why it is that some Jews were being saved while

the greater number were not. It was because most of the descendents of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were children of the flesh whereas only some were truly the called children of God. Those who believe in a system of freewill will explain Israel's general blindness by saying the Jews simply refused to accept Jesus as their Savior. Paul drew a different conclusion. It was this. Those like Jacob were loved, chosen, and called. Those like Esau were hated and rejected. Follow the context and that is the only conclusion you can draw why he mentioned them in this chapter.

In the Old Testament Jacob was the representative head of Israel, a nation God loved and Esau was the representative head of Edom, a nation God hated. In the New Testament each represented two types of people: elect and rejected. From this premise Paul taught God had a remnant seed "according to the election of grace" among the Jews at the time he was living, He had seven thousand that had lived in Elijah's time, and He will have at a future date a great Jewish number that will be turned from ungodliness when the fullness of the Gentiles is accomplished (Romans 9.27-29; 11.1-7 & 25-28). But this was also the basis from which he taught the rest of the Jews were rejected (11.7-10 & 25). And further, he expanded the teaching to show that many Gentiles were also beloved and called. He wrote: "And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? As he saith also in Osee, I WILL CALL THEM MY PEOPLE , WHICH WERE NOT MY PEOPLE; AND HER BELOVED, WHICH WAS NOT BELOVED. AND IT SHALL COME TO PASS, THAT IN THE PLACE WHERE IT WAS SAID UNTO THEM, YE ARE NOT MY PEOPLE; THERE SHALL THEY BE CALLED THE CHILDREN OF THE LIVING GOD" (Romans 9.23-26), and from these words Paul drew the conclusion in chapter 10 that whether Jew or Gentile, all called out believers shall be saved.

If reading in the prophetic record that God hated Esau was not difficult enough for many folk Paul's statement that God loved Jacob and hated Esau before either of them was born or had done good or evil gives them absolute fits. To try to minimize the force of the words so they can maintain their belief that God loves and wants everyone to be saved they make a couple of attempts to explain away what Paul wrote. Some argue God loved Jacob and hated Esau before either of them was born because he foresaw how they would live. Others say God did not hate Esau at all. They point out that sometime biblical references to "hate" do not really mean "hate" at all but rather refer to lesser forms of love than what is given to others. I can accept the point that "hate" sometimes in scripture refers to lesser favor. It is reasonable to interpret the word as they suggest in Genesis 29.30-33 and Deuteronomy 21.15-17. Likewise, one can hardly think of "hate" in its usual sense when Christ said: "If any *man* come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14.26). For "hate" to be understood in its standard sense in that verse would violate the law requiring parents to be honored (Exodus 20.12) and would violate the admonition for husbands to love their wives (Ephesians 5.25). However, these are exceptions to the rule how "hate" is to be understood. Concerning the foresight argument, it stands completely contrary to the reason given to us in the text. The scripture does not say it was because God foresaw that Jacob would do the good and Esau would do the evil that He loved Jacob and hated Esau before either of them was born. Rather, the reason given for loving Jacob and hating Esau was "that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth" (verse 11). Beside, if God's regard for these twins were based upon foresight how each would conduct their lives we must ask how would that discount works. Foresight of their works would still have made works the basis of His love and hate. However Paul's point was neither twin in his own stead was better or worse than the other. It was God's election and calling that

counted. Concerning the argument that “hate” was used here to mean God did not love Esau to the same degree He loved Jacob, again all one has to do is examine what Paul said to see that this argument does not fit the context. That he used “hate” in its usual sense can easily be concluded by what he went on to write. In response to this text he asked, “What shall we say then? *Is there unrighteousness with God*”? He then answered the question: “God forbid” (verse 14). Now, here would have been an excellent time to modify the meaning of hate but instead he applied the usual meaning of the term by pointing out that God told Moses He would have mercy and compassion on whom He would and that it was neither upon the person who willed or ran but upon God that showed mercy (verses 15-16). In other words, he accented God’s sovereignty over man’s freewill and works and he further illustrated that fact by noting Pharaoh was raised up in order that God might show His power and declare His name throughout the earth (verse 17). From this again he drew the conclusion that God will have mercy on whomever He will while also hardening whomever He will (verse 18). Paul then anticipated: “Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will” (verse 19)? Again, Paul could have modified his language but instead he remained firm in teaching God’s sovereignty by turning the anticipated questions around and asking his own: “Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed *it*, why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay; of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? *What* if God, willing to shew *his* wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles” (verses 20-24)? Now, try hard as you may and you will not be able to get this scripture to teach that

God had some degree of love toward Esau, or Pharaoh, or anyone hardened, or any part of the clay made to dishonor.

If one does not know how to deal with God's sovereignty set forth in the manner Paul wrote so be it but one should never try to twist the scripture to give it a meaning that clearly is not intended. The doctrinal truth on display in the text is that men are treated in such manner "that the purpose of God according to election might stand." To that end He loved Jacob and his remnant seed among the Israelites and vessels of mercy, whether Jews or Gentiles. At the same time He hated Esau and his seed, the Israelites left in a state of blind unbelief (Romans 11.7-10), and all the Gentiles that were made unto dishonor.

Closing Thoughts

Let's close with a brief summary and a few thoughts. I said at the outset it was important that the three records be integrated in order to properly understand what the scriptures taught about these twins. Although each record has its own primary focus there is something consistent about all three and this consistent thing is what Paul highlighted when he wrote to the saints at Rome. All three give testimony in one form or another to the teachings of divine election and reprobation. Where there is election there is rejection. Think of it. When a person goes to the polls to vote he chooses some and rejects others. In the case of the twins, God chose Jacob to receive the promises made to Abraham and Isaac, and in so doing He rejected Esau from being the recipient of these promises. He, therefore, appeared and called out Jacob but left Esau to no more than the blessing given to him by his father. The promises given to Jacob continued through his offspring and Israel was God's chosen nation whereas Edom was a nation God rejected and hated. The apostle picked up the consistent theme in the Old Testament and used the case of Jacob and Esau to illustrate the truth of God's sovereign and unconditional election of sinners,

both Jews and Gentiles. However, the flip side could not be denied. If God chose some sinners to salvation, redeemed them by Christ's blood, and called them by His grace, then out of necessity we see He rejected the rest, provided no benefits for them through Christ, and left them in their corrupt state.

If the truths that emerge from these twins cause you problems you may be asking the question, why did God hate Esau? However, you may just as well ask the question, why did He love Jacob. I won't try to answer the question no matter which way it is asked. I simply don't know the answer. Due to human corruption I could very easily see Him hating both. The answer really rests in the hidden residence of God's own sovereign will. When Paul wrote of the blessings of God's electing and predestinating grace in his letter to the saints at Ephesus he was content to say it was "according to the good pleasure of his will" (verse 5). Let's leave it there! And if you are one who believes the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has cast His saving love upon you, I reckon you will never know why He has been pleased to deal with you in a Jacob-like fashion. But know this! You were taken from the same lump of humanity (Romans 9.21) from whence came the profane Esau (Hebrews 12.16). May all the redeemed rejoice that from that lump they were made unto honor. Amen!

-David K. Mattingly
February 26, 2008

