Abraham Dies

Are you suspicious when something seems too cheap? My brothers and I are considering buying a camper to take on our fishing trips so I have been browsing Facebook and Craigslist ads recently. Occasionally I will see one that seems like a really good deal, one of those “too good to be true deals”. When I see one like that, I wonder: What’s the catch? Sometimes they are scams or bait and switch tactics. Often, they are cheap because they are in need of repairs that may not be noticeable since many of these sellers appear to be experts in the glamour shot technique. Typically a seller has greater knowledge of the item being sold which places the buyer at a disadvantage. Sometimes they actually are good deals because the owner just wants a quick sale or doesn’t know the true value of what is being sold. Such were the motives of Esau as we will see in our study of Genesis chapter 25.

The chapter begins with Abraham taking a new wife, Keturah after the death of Sarah. While there is no mention of her heritage, I suspect Keturah was a Canaanite. If so, Abraham’s fussiness over his son’s wife apparently did not extend to his own selection for a spouse. As previously mentioned, another irony is that Keturah bore 6 sons unlike Sarah who had only one after years of waiting. Of those sons, only Midian has a biblical legacy as he was the patriarch of the Midianites. Just as he had done with Ishmael, Abraham sends these 6 sons away to live apart from Isaac. Matthew Henry wrote that Abraham gave common blessings to these and Ishmael while covenant blessings were reserved for Isaac. While Abraham was clearly chosen by God to father the Israelites, the story has shifted to Isaac. Little is said about Abraham’s final years and his death is briefly mentioned. Ishmael is again introduced to the story if only to note his descendants and his death is recorded as well.

While this chapter is entitled “Abraham Dies” the story really is about the relationship between Jacob and Esau and its symbolism. After being barren for 20 years from the time she married Isaac, Rebekah was blessed by God with twins. God revealed to Rebekah his plans for her two sons and this knowledge would influence Rebekah’s future relationship with Jacob and Esau. As the twins are born, Esau comes out first with Jacob holding his heel earning him his name which means heel holder. As the sons grew, Isaac favored Esau while Rebekah favored Jacob. A few verses at the end of the chapter recount the story of how Esau traded away his birthright for a meal providing some symbolism of spiritual matters. First, Esau’s choice of a quick meal over his birthright represents pursuing worldly pleasures of the flesh rather than the spiritual. Second, Esau did not see any value in his birthright. Realizing any benefit from the birthright would only come about when Isaac died which could be far in the future if his life span was anything like that of Abraham who lived to be 175 years old. He may have actually thought of his birthright as a negative since the eldest son would have some priest like responsibilities to minister to the family. Finally, Esau symbolizes the Jews who rejected their birthright as God’s chosen people allowing the Gospel to be taken to the Gentiles. Unlike Esau, Jacob recognized the value of the birthright and sought it eagerly even to the point of trickery which would be a hallmark of his character. It could be that his mother told him about the message from God that the older would serve the younger and that could only come about if he secured the birthright of the older brother. The irony is that Jacob bought what was already his and Esau sold that which he did not own. In Romans chapter 9 Paul writes that God chose Jacob before birth, before he and Esau had done anything good or bad (Rom. 9:11-13). Paul quoted Old Testament scripture where God said I have loved Jacob but Esau I have hated (Mal. 1:2-3). This scripture causes great consternation even today which Paul addressed saying that God is not unjust. I am including the following excerpt from David Guzik’s commentary since I think it captures Paul’s intent in his letter:

*Some object, questioning the fairness of God making such a choice before Jacob or Esau were born. Yet we should regard the love and the hate God spoke of in*[*Malachi 1:2-3*](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Malachi+1.2-3&t=NKJV)*and*[*Romans 9:10-13*](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Romans+9.10-13&t=NKJV)*as having to do with His purpose in choosing one of these two to become the heir of the covenant of Abraham. In that regard, God’s preference could rightly be regarded as a display of love towards Jacob and hate towards Esau. The real thought in*[*Malachi 1*](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Malachi+1&t=NKJV)*and*[*Romans 9*](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Romans+9&t=NKJV)*is much more like “accepted” and “rejected” more than it is like our understanding of the terms “loved” and “hated.”*

*God did not hate Esau in the sense of cursing him to a doomed life in either this world or the next. All told, Esau was indeed a blessed man, and in some ways more well-adjusted than Jacob (*[*Genesis 33:4-9*](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Genesis+33.4-9&t=NKJV)*). Yet in regard to the inheritance of the covenant, it could be rightly said that God hated Esau and loved Jacob.*

*“A woman once said to Mr. Spurgeon, ‘I cannot understand why God should say that He hated Esau.’ ‘That,’ Spurgeon replied, ‘is not my difficulty, madam. My trouble is to understand how God could love Jacob.’” (Newell in Romans, Verse by Verse)*

*Our greatest error in considering the choices of God is to think God chooses for arbitrary reasons, as if His choices were random and senseless. God chooses according to His divine wisdom, love, and goodness. We may not be able to understand God’s reasons for choosing, and they are reasons He alone knows and answers to, but God’s choices are not random or capricious.*

To this I would add that the God who knows our every thought is certainly capable of knowing the choices we will make with our own free will before we are born.

It seems to me that one obstacle in spreading the Gospel message is that nonbelievers do not see the value in a relationship with Jesus Christ. For some the prospect of a reward after death is too distant to think about preferring instead to focus on the pleasures of this life. I’ll close with the following from Ray Pritchard:

*When the story began, Jacob had the soup and Esau had the birthright; in the end Esau had the soup and Jacob had the birthright. Who got the better part of that deal?*

*Bishop Desmond Tutu is a noted black clergyman from South Africa. Several years ago, while speaking to a Christian workers conference, he made the following statement: “When the white man came to Africa, he had the Bible and we had the land. Now the white man has the land, but we have the Bible. We shall see who got the better part of that deal.”*

*There are some things in life that are more important than other things. So many of us spend our days trading away the things that really matter for things that amount to nothing more than a bowl of “red stuff.”*