

Pentwater Bible Church

Hebrews Message 39

October 7, 2018



The Blessing of Jacob and not Esau by Rembrandt

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Pentwater Bible Church

The Book of Hebrews

Message Thirty-Nine

THE LAW BEGAN WITH TERROR

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Hebrews 12:16–21

¹⁶ lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. ¹⁷ For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.

¹⁸ For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, ¹⁹ and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more: ²⁰ (for they could not endure that which was commanded, And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart: ²¹ and so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake (KJV).

UNACCEPTABLE APPROACH TO GOD

Hebrews 12:16–17

¹⁶ lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. ¹⁷ For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.

Because the text here in Hebrews chapter twelve provides the slovenly manner in which Esau valued his birthright it is appropriate to show exactly what happened to him and the circumstances surrounding his sins.

Genesis 25: 19–26

¹⁹And these are the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son. Abraham begat Isaac. ²⁰And Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the Syrian of Paddan-aram, the sister of Laban the Syrian, to be his wife. ²¹And Isaac entreated Jehovah for his wife, because she was barren. And Jehovah was entreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived. ²²And the children struggled together within her. And she said, If it be so, wherefore do I live? And she went to inquire of Jehovah. ²³And Jehovah said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, And two peoples shall be separated from thy bowels. And the one people shall be stronger than the other people. And the elder shall serve the younger. ²⁴And when

her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb. ²⁵And the first came forth red, all over like a hairy garment. And they called his name Esau. ²⁶And after that came forth his brother, and his hand had hold on Esau's heel. And his name was called Jacob. And Isaac was threescore years old when she bare them.” (ASV, 1901)

Isaac eventually married at the age of forty, and his wife Rebekah was barren for about twenty years. The prolonged state of barrenness is meaningful because it ended with an act of divine Providence, clearly a sign that the offspring were predestined to be used for God's purposes. Rebekah was apparently not beyond the normal age for childbearing, as her age is not mentioned. Isaac asked Jehovah to intervene and Rebekah finally became pregnant with twin boys. During a difficult pregnancy the two boys were unusually active within her womb. The activity was not natural, and it worried Rebekah. She suspected an evil omen, in fact she feared for her life. The expressive language of Hebrew captures this activity with an unusual verb *vy-yitrotsetsu*, and translated it means “they crushed and thrust” one another. This foretold their future hostile relationship.

Rebekah inquired of the Lord regarding this and He responded; “*two nations that is, twin progenitors of two nations, were struggling in her womb.*” The Hebrew word for “nation” is *goieem*, which is indicating *both* Jewish and Gentile nations. Common modern Jewish usage of the word *Goy* is to reference the Gentiles. That is not the biblical Hebrew meaning. They became two entirely different people groups. One people would be stronger and the other weaker. He concluded by stating “*the elder shall serve the younger*” (Genesis 25: 23). The first out of the womb was Esau, and after him was born Jacob. Esau was of a ruddy, hairy, reddish color. This Hebrew word *'admoni* is used only twice again the Bible of David (I Samuel 16: 12, 17: 42). His personal name was based upon his appearance, and so was the nation Edom that he eventually founded. *The Jewish Publication Society Torah Commentary* (JPS) on Genesis provides insightful historical information about the terrain of the land Edom relative to Esau's name:

This region probably derived its name from the shaggy nature of the terrain. The Jebel section of Edom has a relatively high annual precipitation and also benefits from snowfall on the hilltops. As a result, it was always distinguished for its woods, forests, and brush. It was not until World War I that the region became finally denuded of vegetation. The Turks cut down the forests in order to service the Hejaz Railroad. (Sarna, 1989, 180)

The text states that” *And after that came forth his brother, and his hand had hold on Esau's heel.*” This is also stated in Hosea 12: 4: “*In the womb he tried to supplant his brother.*” Isaac was sixty years old when the twins were born. The Israelis (Jacob's descendants) and the Edomites (Esau's descendants) have fought continuously. Esau's descendants became additional peoples of the Arab nations. Esau, attempting to retaliate against his father Isaac for not becoming the covenant heir, married a Canaanite woman against his father's wishes. She was Ishmael's daughter Mahalath, and this made the Arab alliance against Israel stronger. Jacob received the Abrahamic Covenant from the Lord through his father Isaac (Genesis 28: 13–15).

THE SELLING OF THE BIRTHRIGHT

Genesis 25: 27–34

“²⁷And the boys grew. And Esau was a skilful hunter, a man of the field. And Jacob was a quiet man, dwelling in tents. ²⁸Now Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison. And Rebekah loved Jacob. ²⁹And Jacob boiled pottage. And Esau came in from the field, and he was faint. ³⁰And Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage. For I am faint. Therefore, was his name called Edom. ³¹And Jacob said, Sell me first thy birthright. ³²And Esau said, Behold, I am about to die. And what profit shall the birthright do to me? ³³And Jacob said, Swear to me first. And he swore unto him. And he sold his birthright unto Jacob. ³⁴And Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentils. And he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way. So, Esau despised his birthright.” (ASV, 1901)

As the boys grew, they each found their way in life with different occupations reflecting their nature. Hunting as a way of life was held in low esteem in ancient Israel. Esau was a skillful hunter, just as Nimrod was a skillful (cunning) hunter (Genesis 10: 8–12). The description of Esau as a hunter, and as “*one who lives by the sword*” further reveals his destructive manner (Genesis 27:40). This is not a positive attribute in the book of Genesis. Esau was well rehearsed in trapping and trickery, which he was required to exercise in successful hunting. Jacob’s choosing of the profession of shepherding led to him being in a settled state instead of being a wanderer. He is characterized as a person laboring within the family unit. He chose to follow the trade of his father and grandfather, which was shepherding.

Many sermons are preached using an inappropriate interpretation of these verses making Jacob out to be the one exercising the subterfuge. From God’s point of view it is the other way around. The text clearly says that it was Esau, as the first-born, who despised his birthright. The Hebrew word for Jacob’s manner translated as “*a quiet man*” is *tam*. It should be translated as “perfect, whole, complete and without blemish”. These verses are interpreted incorrectly because some people have a preconceived notion about Jacob, and bring that to the text instead of letting the text speak clearly regarding the true nature of these two brothers. Malachi 1: 2–3 says; “*Yet I loved Jacob, but Esau I hated.*” Here in the book of Hebrews Paul declares Esau to be a “*profane person*” (Hebrews 12; 16–17). It is important that we understand this truth. It is also crucial that we realize that God is in control of all events, and gets His desired outcome to all of the world’s events. Each parent took one of the children to be a favorite. Rebekah was close to Jacob and Isaac was close to Esau. This alone will bring about animosity between siblings.

The text then moves to the description of the events bringing about the reversal of birthright benefits between the two brothers. Esau came in from the field and said he was faint or hungry. Now it must be pointed out that Isaac had hundreds of men in his employ, and there were many meals available for him to partake. Esau asked to be fed with same red pottage, which Jacob had. Jacob saw an opportunity to exploit his brother’s attitude in order to gain the birthright. The birthright legal status later was codified in the Mosaic Law resulting in a double portion

of the father's inheritance going to the first born (Deuteronomy 21:17). The title to the blessing of the promise included the future possession of Canaan and of the Covenant fellowship with Jehovah (Genesis 27:4, 27–29; 28:4). Jacob knew this, and it led him to anticipate the purposes of God. Esau also knew it, but did not care. He valued the Covenant at the level of a bowl of stew. He knew he was giving the birthright, away along with the blessings that were not of a material but of a spiritual nature, and therefore had no particular value to him. In his own words "*Behold I am going to die (to meet death), and what is the birthright to me?*"

In order to seal the deal Jacob says, "*Swear to me first.*" Esau's agrees to the transaction. But Jacob does not trust his brother. He wants an oath. In the ancient world an oath was an unqualifiedly sacred act. It means that the deal was consummated and irreversible. It made the transaction irrevocable, even if one party was later disappointed. The only thing of value to Esau was the sensual enjoyment of the present. His carnal mind was unable to calculate the spiritual blessings of the future. This showed him to be a profane man, who cared for nothing but the momentary gratification of sensual desires, who "*did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way, and so despised his birthright*" (verse 34). To live on this base level, to satisfy one's appetites, inevitably leads to a despising of spiritual things. He is the one who gave up his birthright; it was not taken from him. Certainly, the profane nature of Esau was a warning for Israel. It is wrong to sacrifice spiritual provisions to satisfy one's physical appetites. Esau saw only the temporal; and he did whatever was necessary to get what he wanted. He did just as Eve did with the food on the tree (Genesis 3: 6).

The Scriptures judge and condemn the conduct of Esau. Ishmael was also excluded from the promised blessing because he was begotten "*according to the flesh,*" so Esau lost his birthright because his disposition was "*according to the flesh.*" The frivolous nature with which he sold his birthright to his brother for a dish of stew, rendered him unfit to be the heir and possessor of the Covenant. God knew all this in advance. But this did not justify Jacob's conduct in the matter. Jacob, the second-born, then reversed the birthright. Being his mother's favorite, she must have shared the oracle from Genesis 25: 23 with him. Jacob had been waiting for this opportunity.

THE FEAR AND TERROR AT MOUNT SINAI

Hebrews 12:18–21

¹⁸ For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, ¹⁹ and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more: ²⁰ (for they could not endure that which was commanded, And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart: ²¹ and so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake;)(KJV).

In describing the believer's position, the apostle draws a contrast between where they were in the Mosaic Law. Next, he will tell them where they are now in Christianity. If these Jewish believers go back to the old system, they are returning to a place that was inaugurated by utter

terror. In contrast, they leave a place of privilege and grace as exemplified by the heavenly city. God wanted the ancient Israelites to fear Him so they would not sin.

Exodus 20:20

Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid; for God has come in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may remain with you, so that you may not sin"(ASV, 1901).

Exodus 19:7

⁷And Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these words which the LORD commanded him (KJV).

The implication of the phraseology is that He said to them, Behold! I have set these matters before you so as to say; Choose for yourselves whether you will act properly. We see a similar wording in Deuteronomy 30:15 where the Lord says; “*See I have set before you today the life and the good, and the death and the evil.*” We see similar application for us today in that God gives us His Word. Are we going to take it seriously or are we going to casually let the Words fall on our ears and then let them pass without settling deeply into the controlling portion of our inner being?

Exodus 19:8

⁸And all the people answered together, and said, All that the LORD hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the LORD (KJV).

Notice how quickly the entire people respond in the affirmative that they will do all that The Lord has spoken they should to. With over one million people in attendance the elders receive the Word in front of them and quickly passed it on. Might they have been impetuous, not fully realizing the extent of the sin that dwelled within them? How do we respond to a message? Do we quickly say; Yes! We will change this or that aspect of our lives to conform to God’s Word without fully pondering the extent of the change necessary?

Exodus 19:9

⁹And the LORD said unto Moses, Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and believe thee for ever. And Moses told the words of the people unto the LORD (KJV).

This is a reference to the thick cloud where God chose to manifest Himself in the Shekinah Glory. Everyone saw it and recognized it as such. God manifested Himself in various ways to impress upon the Children of Israel that He is who He says He is and that they should fear Him. In this way they will hear directly from the King Himself and not from His messenger. In other words, the message will have a much stronger impact. God wanted them to believe His Word *forever*.

Exodus 19:10

¹⁰And the LORD said unto Moses, Go unto the people, and sanctify them to day and to morrow, and let them wash their clothes (KJV).

God is giving them a preparation ritual within the greater message of preparing to receive the Law of Moses. We see this in other places as well. Isaiah 13:3 God speaks of His prepared ones. In numbers 11:18 God says to prepare yourselves for tomorrow you shall eat meat. How did the Lord Jesus prepare Himself for His ministry? First, He had John the Baptist baptize Him and then He immediately was tempted by Satan.

Exodus 19:11

¹¹And be ready against the third day: for the third day the LORD will come down in the sight of all the people upon mount Sinai (KJV).

This verse means that the people will see the Shechinah Glory descend upon the mountain after their three-day cleansing ritual. This is not to be confused with an actual sighting of God Himself.

Exodus 19:12

¹²And thou shalt set bounds unto the people round about, saying, Take heed to yourselves, [that ye] go [not] up into the mount, or touch the border of it: whosoever toucheth the mount shall be surely put to death (KJV):

Moses is here instructed to establish boundaries or limits as a sign to them. They were not to approach beyond the boundary. God wanted them to realize the significance of the Law that He was about to bestow upon them.

Exodus 19:13

¹³There shall not an hand touch it, but he shall surely be stoned, or shot through; whether [it be] beast or man, it shall not live: when the trumpet soundeth long, they shall come up to the mount (KJV).

At the proper time the trumpet blast sounded for a long time to signify that they should now approach the mountain. This blast of an exceedingly long duration would be obvious that God was the initiator not a human.

Exodus 19:14–15

¹⁴ And Moses went down from the mount unto the people, and sanctified the people; and they washed their clothes.¹⁵ And he said unto the people, Be ready against the third day: come not at [your] wives (KJV).

Sexual relations were not permitted for the entire three-day preparation to receive the Lord. This was commanded so that the women should be able to immerse themselves in a Mikvah by the third day and thereby be *tahor*, or ritually pure to receive the Law. If they were to have relations within the three-day period of the giving of the Law perhaps the woman would discharge semen after her immersion and become impure again (*tumah*). Once she has waited the three days after having relations the semen has already become putrid and is not fit to fertilize. It is then considered to be pure regarding the contaminating of the woman who discharged it.

While God is approaching the Israelites, He did not want the fertilization process to occur. It is of His life-giving process from which He wanted a three-day period of cessation. Life belongs to God and to no one else. He gives it and takes it in His own time. Within the first ten Laws given murder or the discretionary taking of a human life only belongs to God. For us we realize that murder is an abomination to God. This included abortion. Especially abortion.

Exodus 19:16–18

¹⁶ And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that [was] in the camp trembled ¹⁷ And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet with God; and they stood at the nether part of the mount.¹⁸ And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly (KJV).

God came to the mountain before the people on the third day. He is always before us in every matter. God preceded Israel and waited for them on the mountain. Picture the huge volume of smoke and fire while the entire mountain was quaking. This was God's method of drawing attention to Himself and making it clear once more that He and no other that was about to communicate His Law to His people. He was creating fear of Himself so they would not sin.

Exodus 19:19

¹⁹ And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice (KJV).

Consider the trumpet. A human can only blow for so long and the sound decreases in volume as the note is held for a long time. In order to again identify His divine nature, the blast was *very* long and *increased* in volume. To make Himself again known God does what no human can do. He blows long and increases in volume. He wants His people to realize that it is Him and none other.

Exodus 19:20

And the LORD came down upon mount Sinai, on the top of the mount: and the LORD called Moses [up] to the top of the mount; and Moses went up (KJV).

How can the Lord descend upon the mountain yet tell us that he spoke to Moses from the heavens? (Exodus 20:19) The Jewish sages believe that he bent the heavens to achieve the apparent contradiction of these two verses. The heavens were bent upon Mount Sinai. That is He bent the upper and lower heavens so that His glory descended upon them and therefore He was simultaneously in Heaven and on Mount Sinai simultaneously.

Exodus 19:21-25

²¹And the LORD said unto Moses, Go down, charge the people, lest they break through unto the LORD to gaze, and many of them perish ²²And let the priests also, which come near to the LORD, sanctify themselves, lest the LORD break forth upon them. ²³And Moses said unto the LORD, The people cannot come up to mount Sinai: for thou chargedst us, saying, Set bounds about the mount, and sanctify it. ²⁴And the LORD said unto him, Away, get thee down, and thou shalt come up, thou, and Aaron with thee: but let not the priests and the people break through to come up unto the LORD, lest he break forth upon them. ²⁵So Moses went down unto the people, and spake unto them (KJV).

The people were obviously becoming excited and trying to break their ranks to get closer to God. God did not want them to perish needlessly. We too have choices we can make to avoid God's punishment. He gives us the opportunity of salvation through the hearing of the Word. If we ignore it we will perish. However, because of His love for us He sends us Pastors and Teachers and others to witness to His greatness and His Kingdom so as to avoid the eternal separation that will occur without a belief in Christ. The priests can come near but they too cannot ascend the mountain. They have a special position in the theocracy but not so special that they can violate Gods Laws.

God then tells Moses to warn the people a second time, just as He gives one ample warning throughout our lives of His presence and commandments, which we must follow. Only Moses and Aaron were allowed on the mountain; the priests and the people were to stand before it. If in their curiosity they saw the Lord they would perish. Moses made three trips to the mountain and back. These instructions vividly reminded the people of the immeasurable chasm between the divine and the human, as well as the miracle of Divine revelation.

Next message: CHRISTIANITY A PLACE OF PRIVILEGE WITH GOD

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