

# JACOB AND ESAU

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In Malachi 1:2-3, the Lord says, “*yet I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau.*” This verse is quoted in the New Testament, as Romans 9:13 says, “*As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.*” This statement can certainly be challenging to our understanding. Unfortunately, those who are unlearned and unstable have wrested this scripture to their own destruction (2 Pet 3:16). For example, John Calvin and his followers have used this passage and others to teach the false doctrine that God has predestined on an individual basis who will be saved and who will be lost and that there is nothing anyone can do to change it. This doctrine in general is completely false, and this particular view of Malachi 1:2-3 and Romans 9:13 is also totally wrong.

## **The nations of Jacob of Esau**

As alleged evidence to support their “predestination” heresy, Calvinists say that God arbitrarily chose to hate Esau *the person* and love Jacob his brother from before they were born. First of all, the context of Malachi 1:2-3 does not pertain to Jacob and Esau the individuals. The context pertains to the *nations* that wore their names, which consisted of their physical descendants. God says, “I have loved *you*,” obviously referring to the nation of Israel, as God begins the book with the words, “The burden of the word of the Lord *to Israel*” (Mal 1:1). Israel replies, “Wherein hast thou loved *us*?” the plural again demonstrating that the nation of Israel (or Jacob) is under consideration. In this same context, Esau refers to the *nation* of Edom, as Edom was the nation of Esau’s descendants (Gen 36:1,8,43). God proves that He loved Israel by pointing out that He had hated and overthrown Edom (or Esau): “*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 forever*” (Mal 1:3-4). Edom was laid waste, “impoverished,” and would continue to be thrown down and receive God’s indignation *because of her wickedness*. This God had done to the nation of Esau, not Esau the individual. In this passage, with both Jacob and Esau, God is talking about the nations, and God’s feelings towards each was a response to their behavior, not the result of Calvinistic predestination. The two nations represented *two manner of people* (Gen 25:23), and God always judges righteously, by the heart, not as a respecter of persons (1 Sam 16:7; 2 Chr 19:7; John 7:24; Acts 10:34-35; Rom 2:5-11; 1 Pet 1:17). Esau is the one who despised his own birthright and sold it for food (Gen 25:27-34; Heb 12:16-17). Also, Esau married Canaanite women, “which were a grief of mind unto Isaac and to Rebekah” (Gen 26:34-35). Later, he also married daughters of Ishmael (Gen 28:6-9). Long before Esau, the “sons of God” had chosen to marry the “daughters of men,” which led to their children becoming wicked to the point that “every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually,” and God then decided to destroy man by the Flood (Gen 6:1-17). Similarly, Esau’s children

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turned to wickedness and God repeatedly foretold the eventual destruction of that nation (Isa 34; Jer 49:7-22; Ezek 25:8-14; Amos 1:11-12; Obad). These prophecies had been fulfilled by Malachi's time, and God uses this as His proof that He loved Israel. Israel was questioning whether God really loved them, as they had received rebukes and punishment from Him. Of course, the chastening of the Lord is itself a reflection of God's love for His children (Prov 3:11-12; Heb 12:5-13). But God proved that He indeed loved Israel by giving them an example of what happens to a nation whom He does not love, namely Edom. Edom was utterly and permanently destroyed as a nation because of her wickedness. God had certainly not done to Israel what He had done to Edom. Therefore, God obviously did not hate Israel. If he did not love Israel, He would have done the same with her as He had with Edom. Instead, God had punished Israel, but preserved a remnant and returned them to the land and established and blessed them there.

## **Blessings according to God's will**

Malachi 1:2-3 is quoted in Romans 9:13 as evidence of the fact that God fulfilled His promise to Abraham through Isaac and then Jacob, not Ishmael or Esau. Romans 9:10-12 reminds us that God ordained that the promises and blessings would come through Jacob rather than Esau from when they were in their mother's womb, before either of them had done any good or evil. In Genesis 25:23, the Lord prophesied to the mother of the twins, Rebekah, saying, *"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."* Thus, God had ordained at the time of their birth that the elder (Esau) would serve the younger (Jacob). But who would serve whom had nothing to do with their eternal *salvation*. The quotation of Malachi 1:2-3 in the next verse, Romans 9:13, is not similarly applied to the time before Jacob and Esau were born. As we have seen, Malachi spoke concerning the two nations. But the fact that God loved the nation of Israel and hated the nation of Edom, though that was based on the behavior of each nation, is further evidence that Israel was chosen as the avenue of fulfillment of God's promises. Neither the context of Malachi 1:2-3 nor that of Romans 9:4-14 has anything to do with the issue of anyone's salvation. It does not speak of God arbitrarily choosing the eternal destination of individuals. No scripture does. Romans 9 merely teaches us that God chooses to give certain talents, abilities, blessings, opportunities, etc. to each person and these things are strictly up to God's will and prerogative. God fulfilled his promises of land, numerous descendants, and the birth of Christ through Isaac and Jacob. This in no way precluded or prevented Ishmael's or Esau's obedience to God and the salvation of their souls. Like everyone else, they will be judged by God according to their own works (John 5:28-29; Rom 2:6; 2 Cor 5:10; Rev 20:11-13).