

## **JACOB AND ESAU**

### **The Good that Comes from Difficult Experiences**

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*Lessons: Genesis 25*

We have here a story of two brothers, both of whom have very different things they have to go through in life. Esau had the hardest time at first, but it seems that in the long run Jacob went through longer and more difficult trials.

We sometimes stop to think of people who have had particularly hard times in life. We think of people who have had serious injuries or handicaps. We think of people who have known pain and difficulties. Do you think that those who have such hard times gain any benefit from them? Perhaps you have noticed that people like that develop such admirable characters that they are an inspiration to other people. Perhaps you notice that they seem to learn through their own difficulties to be sympathetic and understanding of others in such a way that they are able to help others very effectively.

One thing we do know, and it is such an important thing to know, is that the Lord never allows something unless some good can come from it. This is taught in the Writings (*Arcana Coelestia* 6489). It is put very strongly that “not one whit is permitted...by the Lord, except to the end that good may come of it” (*Arcana Coelestia* 6574).

As the story of Esau and Jacob begins, we see Esau really suffering. He is so weary and hungry that he feels he is about to die. When the Writings tell us about this suffering, they note that sometimes people are very “hard” and unfeeling, but that the experiences of life finally “soften them.” This kind of hardness is selfishness, “contempt for others in comparison with self...self-glory and also hatred and revenge (*Arcana Coelestia* 3318). After difficult times, people can be “gifted with another nature; being made mild, humble, simple and contrite in heart” (*Arcana Coelestia* 3318). This means that instead of saying, “I’m better than anybody else,” or “I think other people are nothing compared to me,” they find themselves more humble, and instead of scorning the problems others have, they feel sympathetic towards them.

The weariness and hunger Esau went through was followed by a more inward kind of suffering. This time he wasn’t feeling hurt in his body, as he had when he came in hungry from the field. He was really hurt as to his feelings and hopes, and he gave one of the bitterest cries that we read of in the Word. His father’s blessing had been taken from him, and he cried, “Have you not reserved a blessing for me?...Bless me, also, O my father! And Esau lifted up his voice and wept” (*Genesis* 27:36-38). At first he felt anger and revenge

towards his brother. But years later, when Esau had much experience of life, Jacob returned to him wondering if now Esau would hurt him. Instead, Esau embraced him. This was so touching to Jacob that he felt that he had looked into the face of God (*Genesis 33:10*).

But let us see what Jacob experienced in life. He had been a selfish grabber and had wrongly taken his brother's birthright and his blessing, but this did *not* lead to enjoyment. How often is this same story told? People do things that are wrong, thinking that it will be the road to happiness, and they find instead that it brings them a lot of misery.

One of the things experienced was fear, just as so many people who steal experience. If you steal and are dishonest in order to find success, you have to carry within yourself constantly the fear that you are going to be found out and caught.

Jacob knew the fear of Esau's anger, and then he knew the terrible experience of going on the run, off by himself. He found himself all alone with no possessions or home. That is when he really needed the assurance that he received in a dream in which he saw the Lord at the top of a ladder. When he awoke from that dream, he hoped and prayed that "God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on" (*Genesis 28:20*).

He reached the land where Rachel lived, and isn't it interesting that he became the victim of a trick? The one who outwitted his brother was now to be outwitted himself. Laban made him work for seven years, and then seven more years, and finally for a total of twenty years, and those were hard years. We know this from what he finally said to Laban:

"These twenty years I have been with you...There I was! In the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night, and my sleep departed from my eyes. Thus I have been in your house twenty years...and you have changed my wages ten times...God has seen my affliction and the labor of my own hands" (*Genesis 31:38-42*).

Jacob knew the fear of being chased by Laban when he finally left that land; and then after all those years, when he came near to the land where he had been born, he really felt a fear of what his brother Esau might do to him.

It is said: "Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed" (*Genesis 32:7*). We hear him pray to the Lord, and we see him not only afraid, but humble in a way he had not been before. The prayer was:

"O God of my father...I am not worthy of the least of all the

mercies and of all the truth which You have shown Your servant; for I crossed over this Jordan with my staff, and now I have become two companies. Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, lest he come and attack me” (*Genesis 32:9-11*).

At last the time came for the two brothers, Esau and Jacob, to meet again. And now Jacob bowed himself to the ground before his brother. He had brought great presents for Esau.

To his great joy Esau ran to meet him and embraced him, and they both wept, not for sorrow, but for joy. Esau said that Jacob did not need to give him a present, but this made Jacob all the more eager to give it to him.

“Please take my blessing that is brought to you.”  
(*Genesis 33:10,11*)

That good scene of two brothers and the unselfishness brought out in them, shows one example of this truth: that hard things may happen, but the Lord provides that good may come of them.