



Esau and Jacob as Rivals

Key Verse: *“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

Selected Scripture:
Genesis 25:19-34
LORD.”—Gen. 25:22

THE RIVALRY BETWEEN

Esau and Jacob was unique in that it began before either child was born, when they were both still in the womb of their mother Rebekah. “And the children struggled together within her.” (Gen. 25:22) The physical discomfort was no doubt difficult enough, but Rebekah was also disturbed by the fact that it was happening at all, for truly it would seem impossible for unborn children to be capable of such struggling prior to birth. So, the scriptural account says, “she went to enquire of the

God’s answer to Rebekah’s prayer is found in our Key Verse. We understand from this that God saw far beyond the potential sibling rivalry that was to exist between the two children once they were born, to the time when two nations would come out of their loins. These nations would be very different in their ways and manner of life. One would be stronger than the other, and the nation coming out of the loins of the elder child would be a servant to the nation coming from the loins of the younger.

When the two children were born, the firstborn, named Esau, was immediately followed in birth by his brother, named Jacob. True to God's prediction, it was immediately evident that, although Esau was born first, Jacob was inherently desirous of gaining prominence over his brother, shown by his taking hold of the heel of Esau as they came out of the womb of Rebekah. (Gen. 25:25,26) As the boys grew into young men, their differences became more evident. "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." (vss. 27,28) Even the boys' parents differed as to which of their sons they favored the most.

The rivalry and contrast between Esau and Jacob reached its climax when on one occasion, after spending all day hunting in the field, Esau arrived home exhausted and hungry. He begged Jacob for a portion of lentil stew he had made ["red pottage," vs. 30, *King James Version*]. Jacob replied to his brother that he would give him of his food only in exchange for his birthright—the special rights and privileges that belonged to Esau because he was the firstborn. The Scriptures state, "And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me? And Jacob said, Swear to me this day; and he sware unto him: and he sold his birthright unto Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentiles; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised his birthright."—vss. 32-34

The nations represented by and contained in the loins of Jacob and Esau were Israel and Edom, who many years later were rivals. Israel was God's chosen people, whereas Edom was a nation of strange gods and full of idol worship. Later, Israel would go on to defeat Edom, who became subservient to Israel, thus fulfilling God's original prophecy concerning the rivalry of Jacob and Esau.—Num. 24:17-19 ■