

# (Genesis) 41 - Esau's Profane Act

by S. Lewis Johnson

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*The sermon explores the contrast between Esau's worldly, profane act and Jacob's spiritual focus, highlighting the consequences of Esau's actions and the significance of the birthright.*

**Duration:** 44:07

**Scripture:** Genesis 25:29-34, Genesis 27:1-40, Matthew 6:19-20, Matthew 6:33, Hebrews 12:15-17

**Topics:** "Esau"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses an incident that reveals two views of life. One view focuses on material things and the visible aspects of life, while the other view emphasizes the importance of faith in Jesus Christ for salvation. The preacher urges the audience to recognize their sin and turn to Christ for salvation, emphasizing the need to trust in Him and the sacrifice He made on the cross. The sermon also highlights the importance of laying up treasures in heaven rather than focusing solely on earthly possessions.

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## Transcript

Will you turn with me now to Genesis chapter 25 and we continue our exposition of the book of Genesis and read as our scripture reading this morning the last few verses of chapter 25 and then I'd like to turn to Hebrews chapter 12 and read a verse or two there about Esau. Genesis chapter 25 and verse 27, we read, When the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the field, but Jacob was a peaceful man, living in tents. Now Isaac loved Esau because he had a taste for game, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

And when Jacob had cooked stew, Esau came in from the field and he was famished. And Esau said to Jacob, Please let me have a swallow of that red stuff there, for I am famished. Therefore his name was called Edom.

Edom means red. So that was Esau's second name. Esau meant the hairy one.

Edom, red. But Jacob said, First, sell me your birthright. And Esau said, Behold, I'm about to die, so of what use is the birthright to me? And Jacob said, First, swear to me.

So he swore to him and sold his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew and he ate and drank and rose and went on his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.

Now turn with me to Hebrews chapter 12 and listen as I read verses 14 through 17 of chapter 12 of Hebrews. And here we have an inspired comment upon the story of Esau in the book of Genesis, dealing not only with the sale of the birthright, but also the lost blessing about which we shall read later in the book of Genesis. Hebrews chapter 12 and verse 14 through verse 17.

This is one short paragraph. Pursue peace with all men and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God.

I think the authorized version renders it, although I didn't look this up, this is memory, fails of the grace of God. Now that is a reference to Esau. You can see he's leading up to this and so we're justified in saying that it is Esau who failed of the grace of God.

That no root of bitterness springing up cause trouble and by it many be defiled. That there be no immoral or godless person like Esau. The authorized version renders this, no fornicator or profane person like Esau who sold his own birthright for a single meal.

And there is a little bit of a stress in the Greek text at this point on the word translated single here. One morsel of bread, just one morsel of bread, not a series of meals, but a single meal. For you know that even afterwards when he desired to inherit the blessing he was rejected for he found no place for repentance though he sought for it with tears.

Now there are two ways to understand that last statement, no place for repentance. It might be understood of Esau's seeking repentance himself but it's much more likely that what it means is that he found no place for a repentance on Isaac's part. For Isaac had blessed Jacob and had not blessed Esau and so the change of mind that he sought was a change of mind in Isaac that he might receive the blessing.

But he found no place for a change of mind in Isaac though he sought for it with tears. For Isaac though his own faith had evidently deteriorated had nevertheless recognized in what had happened when he was deceived by Rebekah and Jacob the hand of God and recognizing the hand of God and the providence of God and the blessing of Jacob when he thought he was blessing Esau. Isaac at least had enough spirituality to stick by the blessing that had taken place.

Consequently Esau found no place for change of mind in Isaac though he sought it carefully with tears and the bitter cry of Esau seeking for the blessing after it had been stolen from him is one of the tragedies of the book of Genesis. May the Lord bless this reading of his word. The subject for this morning in the exposition of the book of Genesis is Esau's profane act.

F.B.

Meyer in his little commentary on the life of Jacob begins one of his chapters by saying brothers were these two men yes twin brothers but brothers could not differ more widely before their birth their difference was foretold at their birth it was evident from their birth it began to broaden and increase the linked hands of the brothers reaching across the tiny reel of their earliest infancy were soon parted as the stream of life widened between them and they passed to their destiny along opposite banks it is true that no two brothers could be more different it would seem than Esau and Jacob these utter opposites however illustrate some crucial aspects of human life they represent two views of life in the case of Esau there is the man of the world in the case of Jacob there is the quiet

man Esau is the man whose God was his belly to use Paul's expression in Philippians chapter three and Jacob is the man whose God was Jehovah to use one of the psalmist's expressions Alexander White who has also written a chapter on the life of Esau has said that Esau lost his birthright with all its blessings largely through his lack of imagination but what the Scotsman meant by imagination is not what we mean when we use the term today he meant that the things that are unseen the things that are eternal were the things that Esau had no imagination of on the other hand Jacob with all of his frailties and all of his faults and all of his crookedness was a man who at least had one priority right he was a man who trusted in Jehovah the result was that Esau was a man who looked at things

purely from the standpoint of the material in the present and the visible but Jacob is a man who had a different attitude and that's the second thing about the two men that is crucial there are two attitudes to life Esau's attitude was the attitude of unbelief it was the attitude of unconcern he is the living illustration of the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God for they are foolishness to him neither can he know them for they are spiritually discerned and Esau had evidently no comprehension of spiritual things and no desire for spiritual things he's the man of whom the writer of the epistle to the Hebrew speaks in terms of fornicator and profane or godless man he's the earthbound man he's the man whose vision is only so far as things on this earth on the other

hand Jacob is the man who has faith with all of his frailties and faith is something that pleases God the scriptures say without faith it is impossible to please him and Jacob though there were many other things that he did not yet have had that fundamental thing faith he was not a profane man profane incidentally in the sense in which the Bible uses it is a term that expresses that which is secular profane itself is derived from the Latin word *phonem* which means temple and the Latin prepositional prefix *pro* which means before and so it referred to the plot of ground out in front of the temple not within the temple and therefore it signified things that were secular things that were not dedicated to God and so the profane man may be a very personable and likable kind of man but he is a

man who does not have any fundamental relationship to spiritual things Esau was profane Jacob was a man of faith so far as their everyday life was concerned you might have preferred the other one to Jacob but nevertheless there was a fundamental commitment which later manifested itself in growth and grace and then I think these two illustrate the two destinies of life there are those who pass through this human life with us with whom we rub shoulders with whom we talk with whom we may live and as a matter of fact with whom we may live in the closest of relationship husband and wife and still when the time of death comes the two pass to different destinies Esau is a man who failed of the grace of God he fell short of the grace of God and on the other hand there is Jacob who for nine months

at least was with Esau in the womb of Rebekah Jacob the man of faith rough he led a very tortuous kind of life but nevertheless he ultimately found his way into the presence of God and furthermore being a recipient of the sanctifying ministry of the Holy Spirit this crooked man this man who so often sought to run ahead of God it seemed near the end of his life manifests the growth in grace by blessing Joseph and saying the God before whom my father's Abraham and Isaac walked the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day the angel who has redeemed me from all evil bless the lads now that is real growth in grace and that came from the fundamental commitment that had been implanted within him by God in the beginning he was interested in the things of the Lord so here we have the

two men Jacob and Esau and I ought to ask the question of you as we begin in whose footsteps are you following now the passage begins with a note concerning the family situation and this story incidentally is

written in a very remarkable way there is an extraordinary solidity and precision of style manifested in this brief little account one of the commentators has said in this Moses occasionally surpasses even Dante now the two sons have spoken of in the 27th verse of the 25th chapter where we read when the boys grew up Esau became a skillful hunter a man of the field but Jacob was a peaceful man living in tents Esau and Jacob were as opposite as the nations that they begat Esau was the father of Edom enemies of the children of Israel Jacob is the man whose name becomes Israel and after

whom the children of Israel are named but these two men are as different as those nations that they fathered in the case of Esau we have the rugged cunning hunter incidentally there is nothing wrong with hunting of course but for you hunters in the field I want to pass on a choice bit of biblical learning for you there are only two hunters that I can remember who are mentioned in the Bible and both of these men are mentioned as judged by God one of them is Nimrod he was a rebel against the Lord and the other is Esau this cunning hunter and Esau is sent forth in Scripture as one who was totally indifferent to the fundamental facts of spiritual things Esau loved excitement but he was an undisciplined man he was the very proverb of manly courage no doubt Isaac loved him he loved him not only

because of the things that he received on his table as a matter of fact we learned later on Rebecca could cook goat meat so well that Esau couldn't tell the difference between goat and venison so it was not simply that that caused Esau to be beloved by Isaac he was a man's kind of man he was the ruggedest the brawniest the shaggiest of all the rugged brawny shaggy creatures of the field and of the forest among whom he lived and died he had an eye like an eagles no doubt his ear never slept his foot took the firmest hold of the ground his hand was full of all of the kinds of manly skills that men and others admire no doubt he was an expert with his bow and arrow furthermore he was the pride of the whole of the family because when he came home in the afternoon he usually came home with some

provisions he was a prince among men and no doubt a prime favorite both of men and women and even the children and it's obvious too that his personality was an appealing kind of personality for in spite of the tragedy that affected him later on it is Esau who behaves in a most personable way with Jacob his brother who had he thought stolen his blessing and bought his birthright from him but in spite of all of this that one says about Esau that is good he was nevertheless a pagan man all the time he was more an animal than he was a man in the truest sense he was all body and no soul and spirit all the time a profane person who failed of the grace of God it is sadly true but it is possible for individuals who are very appealing very personable very admirable in the things that we men and

women admire but nevertheless it's very possible for that person to be just what Esau was a fornicator and a godless man it's one of the sad tragedies of the Word of God that we do have that the cunning hunter I heard of a minister once who went hunting he should have known better I guess but anyway he went hunting and suddenly a big bear got after him he took off so fast and his coat was flying in the breeze so straight that you could have played checkers on the back of it and he was desperate he was looking for something that he might escape the from the bear the bear was gaining on him and finally he saw a tree but the lowest limb was 20 feet from the ground he made a frantic leap for it and missed however he grabbed it on the way back that's my hunting story for the day now notice the

two parents we read in verse 28 now Isaac loved Esau because he had a taste for game the text reads in the Hebrew because the game was in his mouth but Rebecca loved Jacob now here is an example of the conflict and tragedy of preferential treatment of children it often happens you know even in the 20th century that there is preferential treatment of children Isaac loved Esau Isaac's faith was at this time

evidently decaying but Esau but Jacob is the one upon whom Rebecca had set her heart there was something that was fundamentally similar between Rebecca and Jacob and as far as I can tell we must assume in the light of the later things that we read in chapter 27 and following that it was the spiritual kinship that she felt with Jacob she remembered the prophecy that the older shall serve

the younger and so consequently she understood that Jacob was ultimately to have the birthright it was the prophecy of the Word of God now she did not of course have the faith and trust to rest in the promise of God she wanted to scheme a little and connive a little in order to obtain the birthright and the blessing for Jacob she loved Jacob however because of this spiritual relationship that existed between them and this is an illustration of the fact men that it's always good to stand on the woman's side because this is a woman's world in which we live it is not a man's world now in case you wonder about that think of this when a man is born what do they say how is his mother and then when a man is married what do they say wasn't she a lovely bride and then when a man dies what do they

say how much did he leave her so you can see that from beginning to end this is a woman's world now Jacob and Rebecca had this thing between them Rebecca loved Jacob and Jacob was under the influence of Rebecca it is great to have a mother's Christian influence in one's life too I don't want to make fun of that because many men have been in the human side at least blessed by having a faithful mother evangelistic singer F.A.

Mills who died some years ago had a wonderful Christian mother she raised her children in a Christian home and when she died Mr.

Mills sang at her funeral and in the song that he sang there was this stanza oh mother when I think of thee tis but a step to Calvary thy gentle hand upon my brow is leading me to Jesus now it's great to have a Christian mother and for you Christian mothers one of your greatest tasks in life the greatest no doubt is to minister to your husband and to your children in such a way that they remember you spiritually no doubt Jacob never forgot the influence of Rebecca upon him and though she was had a preference for him there was still a great deal of good that came from it well the sale of the birthright is a rather prosaic incident it seems so inconsequential until you read in the New Testament that this incident is fraught with far-reaching consequences one day Esau just happened to come

in when Jacob was cooking a stew now you can see from this that Jacob was a mature man that is the meaning of that is that he did the things that he was called to do with more maturity than Esau Esau was the cunning hunter Jacob was the mature man that is he was a man who tended the flocks and the herds in the way that he should have and he also dwelt in so he was around the house a great deal some have said he was a mother's boy well there is no real indication of that in the word so we'll just let that drop we know this that he was a man who spent time around the tent and furthermore we know he could cook so it just happened say it just happened last week incidentally someone stood up in the audience after the meeting and said to a friend that she had evidently brought to the meeting

since I had said a few words about the sovereign grace of God I've been known to do that occasionally she turned to her friend and said he occasionally gets off on that subject she doesn't know I heard the conversation and but then she went on and said something that I thought was rather interesting as it was reported to me she said he occasionally gets off on that subject but then she said when I first started coming here I used to believe that other way but now I believe this way so getting off on that subject occasionally does some good now here it just so happened speaking as an Armenian it just so happened

that Esau had been out hunting and when he came back home there was Jacob cooking some lentil stew red levels on Jacob stove now I understand that this is still a very savory kind

of dish I'm not interested in it myself except except for one thing it does contain rice and I do like rice being a Charlestonian you know Charlestonians eat rice and worship their ancestors and especially eating rice is good but it was made of onions and garlic and rice and then mixed with some form of meat like lamb or of beef and it no doubt was a dish that smelled wonderfully to Esau as he came in from the field the Hebrew text says he was faint we often say that I'm faint with hunger not only famished not only hungry but from hunger and so as he comes in there is Jacob now it is just of course a happening you understand but when Esau arrives he sees this and smells this that Jacob is doing and in the 30th verse he makes this very vivid request for something to eat he says let me gulp

that Hebrew word means almost let me gulp let me swallow some of this red stuff there literally of the red this red and it's not surprising incidentally that he repeats himself because you know when people do get in a hurry they do tend to repeat themselves so he was in a hurry he wanted something to eat and he says let me swallow some of this red stuff there and the Bible adds Moses adds at that point therefore his name was called Edom or red he got his name from this incident and throughout his life this incident attached itself to Esau well Jacob is a very intelligent man I would never have liked to have made a bargain with Jacob I know that people say of course they've even used the expression he me out of this but we'll see later on that Laban Gentile Jacob out of a lot too so we

shouldn't think of Jacob as the only crooked man in the Bible it actually belongs to human nature now these are not the first words about the birthright it's very clear they had discussed this previously everybody knew the prophecy that the elder should serve the younger Jacob no doubt had approached at other times but now he saw his opportunity Esau was weak and it might be that at this point he would sell the birthright now what is involved in the birthright well of course there was a double portion of the inheritance that is there was worldly prosperity involved in it perhaps well that's not the real thing that interested Jacob nor was it the thing that made much of a difference with Esau because he became a very wealthy man later on he had a retinue of 400 warriors who served him so

he became a wealthy influential man it was however the the thing that made the person who possessed the birthright the priestly head of his family he became the person who dealt with the Lord and when the Lord spoke he spoke to the person who possessed the birthright and so the person who possessed the birthright was the mediator between God and the family the person who possessed the birthright was the one who had the privilege of communion with the Lord it was he who was the spiritual leader it was he who was the priest of the family so Jacob thought a great deal of this it was not worldly prosperity that he was interested in nor was it immunity from trials because you had the birthright it didn't mean that therefore you were going to have an easy life as a matter of fact it was just

the opposite he wanted to stand however in the spiritual line of Abraham and Isaac and especially in the messianic line to be in the line that would ultimately lead to the Messiah he wanted that spiritual relationship he wanted to be in the spiritual aristocracy he wanted to be a true pilgrim in every sense on the way to eternity and so he wanted the birthright it was an expression of a desire that God had put in his heart for fellowship with God in a most intimate way so seeing his opportunity he said first sell me your birthright sell me your birthright today well Esau gives a frivolous reply which indicates that he really wasn't interested in spiritual things at all to him he is maybe the first hunter who invented the expression of bird in the hand is worth two in the bush because he

responds in this frivolous way I'm about to die so of what use then is the birthright to me well Jacob wants to nail it down so that there's no question about it and he said swear to me today first swear to me now Jacob's methods are not admirable after all God had promised him the birthright he could have waited but Jacob's not sanctified yet he has the right adjustment in his life the priorities of the Lord are there he is fundamentally committed to the Lord God but he's not yet sanctified and so we should not expect him to live in the way that he will live later he wants to nail it down now so in the power of the flesh he will have this birthright first swear to me but on the other hand while we criticize Jacob notice Esau while Jacob's methods are not admirable his interests were on

the other hand in the case of Esau his interests are very very bad listen to what he says or listen to what he does so he swore and he sold him his birthright the solemnity of the matter was no deterrent to a hungry Esau one morsel of bread a single meal is all the value that he puts on the place of special communion with God and my dear friend sitting in the audience one wonders what is the evaluation that we place on communion with God when spiritual things are secondary and tertiary in our lives you men your businesses stand first often in your life you women the interests of your children their social well-being frequently stand higher than the interests of the Word of God we are playing the same old game of Esau again when that happens Esau the godless profane man he swears he sells

his birthright and we read the tragic sentence in verse 34 then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew and then notice the last of that sentence he ate he drank he rose he went his way there is something even in the expression of Moses that suggests carnality so carnal that one feels cannot help but feel some contempt for Esau for the likeness with which he took the privilege of fellowship with God now occasionally when we studied Jacob and Esau we are inclined to think let me put it this way we are inclined to have sympathy with Esau rather than Jacob I believe that most of us feel that way we read through the account and we cannot help but have our heartstrings tugged at by the tragedy of the life of Esau and when we see Jacob scheming and conniving this crooked man we tend to want to

condemn Jacob and admire Esau and feel compassion for him but notice God's view of Esau look at that last sentence thus Esau despised his birthright so this is God's view of this handsome man with the ruddy skin and the luxuriant air the man of the open country the rugged lover of the chase he despised his birthright scripture has no word of condemnation for Jacob at all but there is unequivocal condemnation of Esau and when we read in the New Testament that he is called a fornicator and a profane man who for one morsel of bread sold his birthright we have God's view of this personable attractive manly kind of man with the generous spirit but who deep down within was totally empty of spiritual concern now there are many lessons in this story in Esau we see in addition to what we've

already seen that little things often reveal the real nature of a person it's not the average kind of experience but it's sometimes that unusual little thing that gives your clue to the character of an individual and this little incident of the cooking of the lentil stew and the combination of the chase revealed the kind of man that Esau was the trifle showed that he was empty spiritually in Jacob of course we see the fundamental necessity of commitment to God now he should have waited but nevertheless there was the fundamental commitment I'd like to return to what I began with for the remaining moments of our study I began by saying that this incident reveals two views of life it does there is one view of life in which the things that are visible material are made the predominant

interest and the other view of life is the view of life in which the things that are eternal the things that are lasting the things that are invisible are made the things of special interest Carlisle has an interesting

paragraph in which he describes Esau he says he's that kind of man of whom we are in the habit of charitably saying that he is nobody's enemy but his own but in truth he is God's enemy because he wastes the splendid manhood which God has given him passionate impatient impulsive incapable incapable of looking before him refusing to estimate the worth of anything which does not immediately appeal to his senses preferring the animal to the spiritual he's rightly called a profane person alas while the body is so broad and brawny must the soul lie blinded dwarfed stupefied

almost annihilated two friends were talking one spoke to the other about a good man who left a sizable estate the other said what a pity that the man left his money behind when he might have sent it on before him he's not likely to ever hear again of his money now the Lord Jesus said something about things like this he said lay not up for yourselves treasures in heaven treasures upon the earth but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven it is possible to send our treasure on ahead of us and Jacob is the kind of man who did that Esau was the kind of man who left everything here furthermore this incident reveals two attitudes of life there is the attitude of unbelief in the case of Esau he had the opportunities that Jacob had he had the knowledge of spiritual things so far as we know they

were twins they were brought up together they were together constantly mother fed one and the other you can just see Rebecca just like this twins twins someone has said is the living proof there's no such thing as free will but you can see that these two constantly together had equal opportunities but the attitudes that they had were different in the case of Esau emptiness blindness obtuseness stubbornness with respect to spiritual things in the case of Jacob oh there was the crookedness and the scheming and the conniving but nevertheless there was the fundamental commitment ultimately of course today it comes down to the relationship that we bear to the cross of Jesus Christ may I ask you where is your fundamental commitment is it to the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ and the forgiveness

of sins that we receive through faith in him who died for sinners is that your fundamental trust is that really expressive of the fundamental commitment of your life or is it something else is it perhaps that you think that you can get to heaven by the things that you do do you not realize that when you think that you can get to heaven by the things that you do that you are slandering the God of heaven who has given Jesus Christ for sinners do you think for one moment that anything yet that you can do to obtain eternal life can compare with what the scriptures say about you as a sinner in under guilt and condemnation and headed for a Christless eternity and that the Lord Jesus has offered the atoning sacrifice for sins don't you see that if it were possible that righteousness could come

by the law there would be no necessity for the death of Jesus Christ in fact as we said in the studies in Galatians the cross of Christ would be the greatest blunder that this world has ever seen and God would be the one who had committed it Christ died for the simple reason that there is no salvation apart from the blood that was shed it was a necessity if there is to be any salvation that the Lord Jesus Christ the Son of God should die for sinners one of the most famous of the Scottish evangelists of the 20th century was John McNeill he's now with the Lord he ministered in Scotland he ministered in the United States even in Birmingham Alabama in the church of which I was a member before I came to Dallas the South Hollands Presbyterian Church there mr.

McNeill was a man who traveled all around he was an evangelist primarily and he was known as that but he did stay in places for a little while and generally left because evangelists usually run out of messages after a while they're not used to staying in one place they're very good for a while but then they have to go on that's characteristic of evangelists I speak as a Bible teacher of course but anyway mr. McNeill once

got in a bunker and he was on it on the golf course this is said of him he got in a bunker on a golf course and he was flailing away and unable to get out of this giant bunker and one of his preacher friends said to the other preacher friend with whom they were playing well mr.

McNeill has finally got a steady job well anyway he was a very godly man and he was an evangelist who served with the British forces in World War one he went to France where he did duty in the young men's Christian Association when that Association was truly Christian his biographer Alexander Gamay tells an incident that happened when he landed in France the commanding general wanted him to come in as the man who would be ministering to the men to give him some instruction and one of the things the commanding general said to mr.

McNeill was now I want you to instruct the men that when they go over the top that if they should die if they should fall from the enemy's fire that it's going to be all right for them in the next world because they died for their country mr. McNeill is said to have replied to the general general if one of your men under your command were to win the Victoria Cross for valour and I were to belittle the deed by which the declaration was won you would not like it and I want to tell you general that you are cheapening Jesus Christ's sacrifice and according to mr.

Gamay the conversation ended right there and he was never in his preaching required to say anything other than the fact that if one does not believe in Jesus Christ there is no salvation and finally there are two destinies of life just think of it one mess of pottage sometimes one little of some kind of liquid is the thing that makes a difference one moment unbridled passion one forbidden look one forbidden act in this case one look at one mess of pottage but oh the bitter cries of regret that followed so I say to you my dear friends in the audience I will not be able to preach to you forever and some of you are very young I want you to remember that there are only two views of life there are only two attitudes that we may have to life and there are only two destinies and the one road that leads to eternal life is the road that has been made possible by the blood that Jesus Christ shed on Calvary's cross and so I urge you as an ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ to recognize your sin and guilt and condemnation and therefore your need and to turn from trust in whatever you may be trusting in other than him come to Christ put your trust in him by the grace of God respond to the ministry of the Holy Spirit and conviction and can and by that ministry of the Holy Spirit believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved may God speak to your heart remember Esau the profane man may God help you to turn from that kind of life shall we stand for the benediction we are grateful to the father for the privilege of proclaiming the Word of God and we do ask that through the Holy Spirit thou will speak to the hearts of those who may be here who do not know the Lord Jesus Christ Oh God deliver us from the destiny of an Esau through the work of the Holy Spirit bring to faith repentance and eternal life may grace mercy and peace be ours through the Lord Jesus we pray in his name Amen

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