

Old Testament Windows

Session Four

Read Deuteronomy 25:17-19.

Does this story have any message for us today? If so, is it a message about God, about us, or both?

Before Jacob and Esau are born, their futures seem to be determined. See Genesis 25:23.

Does this passage tell us that the two sons' fates were predetermined?

Read Genesis 25:24-34.

Why do you think Esau "traded" his birthright (a double share of the inheritance from his father)? What does this event tell you about Esau? What does the story tell you about Jacob? Who comes out looking better?

Esau and Jacob represent two forces in each of our lives and in the world as a whole. Esau symbolizes the body, the material world, whose untamed elements need to be conquered. Jacob symbolizes the soul, the spiritual world. Initially these two worlds do not co-exist. Yet they need each other – they are 'twins.'

Esau and Jacob let us see that we explore the nature of God and ourselves when we read the Bible. We are always working out who we are and who we think God is along the way. We get lost; we find our way back. But always the way is there, waiting.

If you can, do an internet search for a picture of "icon of Jacob and Esau from the monastery of St. John". Esau is dressed in red, symbolizing humanity; Jacob is in the blue of the divine. Their faces touch. The icon depicts motion. They are not yet quite embracing, but they appear to be just a step away from doing so. Esau's sword is on the ground and the brothers together are standing on it.. In the background is "Jacob's ladder," which he saw in a dream after his deception led him away into exile, and on which he saw angels ascending and descending.

Amalek is a descendant of Esau. Thus the Amalekites have a familial connection to the Hebrew people. So when the call comes to blot out the memory of Amalek, it is not a call to destroy an outsider. Whenever we hear the story of Amalek, the story of Esau and Jacob must be in the background.

Read I Samuel 15:1-9.

What do you think of God in this story? What do you think of Saul? Why do you think Saul didn't destroy the Amalekite king and the "best of the sheep and oxen," etc.?

In the history of Israel, this command to blot out Amalek was a marker. These words are read each year in synagogues on the Sabbath before Purim. (The rabbinical fathers explained that the command to curse Amalek by blotting out his line forever was fulfilled through the death of Haman in the book of Esther. It's a lengthy story, but engaging one if you have time to read it.) And each time these words are read, ironically, Amalek is remembered, undoing the command to forget. But there seems to be something here God wants us to remember. What do you think it is?