

## THE CHURCH OF THE FIRSTBORNS

### The Esau Experience

1. **Heb 12:16-17**—Here, Paul recounts the sad history of Esau’s rejection and loss of privileges as the firstborn of the family;
2. The story is given as a warning to the Hebrew Christians against losing their glorious place in God’s eternal plan, as a result of compromising on their unique faith for the sake of temporary benefits, as Esau did.
3. **Gen 25:22-23**—Jacob and Esau are described prophetically as symbols representing two nations, two manner of people
  - a. Literally, two nations
    - i. Jacob—represents the nation of Israel who would descend from him
    - ii. Esau—representing his descendants, known as the Edomites who were historically in constant conflict with Israel
  - b. Figuratively, two spiritual experiences
    - i. Jacob—who understood the significance and value of God-given gifts, overcomers, so much so that he was willing to commit fraud to obtain them
    - ii. Esau—who was profane, represents those who do not value spiritual things in a correct light and end up exchanging them for things of lesser value
4. **“The older shall serve the younger”**—Just as Jacob obtained prominence over Esau, Israel ended up being the stronger and more prominent of the two nations
  - a. Just as Esau’s firstborn privileges were transferred from Esau to Jacob by divine intervention, his descendants, the Israelites, would receive special favors from God to become His chosen people above all the nations of the earth
5. Israel as the firstborn of all the nations of the earth (**Exo 4:21-23**)
6. Israel receives the firstborn privileges (**Rom 3:1-2; Rom 9:3-5**); to them was given the oracles of God, the covenants, the law, the Sabbath, the sanctuary, the gift of prophecy, the Messiah came from their line
  - a. **“Salvation is of the Jews”**—the saving message entrusted to the Jewish nation and the Gentile nations were to come to the knowledge of salvation through Israel (**John 4:22**)
  - b. **“Jews to lead Gentile nations to the worship of God”** (**Zech 8:20-23**)
7. But just as Esau was rejected and found unfit to exercise the rights and privileges of the firstborn, national Israel found herself being rejected by God and being divested of her rights and privileges in favor of the Gentiles (**Matt 8:11-12; Act 13:46**)
  - a. She “despised” her birthright as Esau did for temporary benefit
  - b. Israel did not value and appreciate the high spiritual blessings God showered upon her as God’s chosen people; by their actions the nations showed that she was unfit to exercise the rights and privilege of the firstborn
  - c. Unwilling to exercise faith and patience in God’s providence, they just wanted immediate and temporary benefits—i.e. freedom from Roman yoke and national greatness
  - d. They did not value the gift of prophecy manifested in their midst and ended up stoning the prophets and killing them (**Matt 23:37**)

8. What led Esau to live a profane life and sell his birthright for a bowl of lentils? It is the same reason today why people are profane and live irreligious lives, unable to appreciate spiritual things:

Gluttony is the prevailing sin of this age. Lustful appetite makes slaves of men and women, and beclouds their intellects and stupefies their moral sensibilities to such a degree that the sacred, **elevated truths of God's word are not appreciated**. The lower propensities have ruled men and women. **CD 32**.

The Lord has instructed me that as a general rule, we place too much food in the stomach. Many make themselves uncomfortable by over-eating, and sickness is often the result. The Lord did not bring this punishment on them. They brought it on themselves; and God desires them to realize that pain is the result of transgression.

Many eat too rapidly. Others eat at one meal food which does not agree. If men and women would only remember how greatly they afflict the soul when they afflict the stomach, and how deeply Christ is dishonored when the stomach is abused, they would be brave and self-denying, giving the stomach opportunity to recover its healthy action. While sitting at the table we may do medical missionary work by eating and drinking to the glory of God....

What a pity it is that often, when the greatest self-denial should be exercised, the stomach is crowded with a mass of unhealthful food, which lies there to decompose. The affliction of the stomach affects the brain. The imprudent eater does not realize that he is disqualifying himself for giving wise counsel, disqualifying himself for laying plans for the best advancement of the work of God. But this is so. **He cannot discern spiritual things**, and in council meetings, when he should say, Yea and Amen, he says, Nay. He makes propositions that are wide of the mark. The food he has eaten has benumbed his brain power. **Self-indulgence debars the human agent from witnessing for the truth**. The gratitude we offer to God for His blessings is greatly affected by the food placed in the stomach. Indulgence of appetite is the cause of dissension, strife, discord, and many other evils. Impatient words are spoken and unkind deeds are done, dishonest practices are followed and passion is manifested,—and all because the nerves of the brain are diseased by the abuse heaped upon the stomach. **TSDF 168**

## The Church of the Firstborn

9. The question is, does God still have a “firstborn” among the many denomi-nations of earth today?
10. **Heb 12:23** talks of the general assembly of “the church of the “firstborn” which are figuratively come to Mount Zion, upon which the new Jerusalem is built
11. What is this “**church of the firstborn**” a reference to? What is “**firstborn**” a reference to?
12. Here, “firstborn” is not a reference to Jesus Christ although He is called “**firstborn**” or “**first begotten**” (**Col 1:15, 18; Heb 1:6; Rom 8:29; Rev 1:5**), simply because it is in the plural form, “**firstborns**” (ἐκκλησίᾳ πρωτοτόκων);
- “*prototokown*”—plural form
  - same word used in **Heb 11:28** referring to all the firstborns of Egypt, both man and cattle
13. Literally means “**church of the firstborns**” or “**church of the firstborn ones**”—It is a reference to believers in general who compose the church of Jesus Christ;
- Their names are written in heaven (Luke 10:20)**

- b. **They are just men made perfect**—who have Christ’s righteousness by faith (**Col 1:28; Phil 3:15; Heb 11:40**); Christian perfection was available in the time of the disciples and even now; not to be confused with character perfection which is saved for the final generation
  - c. **They are by faith sitting with Christ in heavenly places at the present (Eph 2:5-6)**
14. Does God have a church of the firstborns (church composed of spiritual firstborns) today?
15. **IMPORTANT:** The Seventh-day Adventist church is standing in the very position where old Israel used to be:
16. To this denomination was restored practically every advantage national Israel had!
- a. The **oracles** of God—a clearer understanding of the plan of salvation especially for the people living in the time of the end
  - b. The **sanctuary** service truth, focusing on Christ’s final ministration in the heavenly sanctuary
  - c. The Law
  - d. The Sabbath
  - e. And even the gift of Prophecy

“In reviewing our past history, having traveled over every step of advance to our present standing, I can say, Praise God! As I see what God has wrought, I am filled with astonishment and with confidence in Christ as Leader. We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and his teaching in our past history. We are now a strong people, if we will put our trust in the Lord; for we are handling the **mighty truths of the word of God**. We have everything to be thankful for. **3SM 162**

17. It is a tremendous privilege to be part of this organization! And yet it seems that many of us have forgotten the way God had led us in our past history
18. Many of us take it for granted that we are Seventh-day Adventists and place little value on the privileges and gifts bestowed upon us as divinely favored of the churches:
- a. Lack of appreciation for the gift of prophecy as manifested in the ministry of Ellen White; the **Spirit of prophecy** is slighted, EGW’s books are not read; as a result, there is a lack of spirituality in the church

I am filled with sadness when I think of our condition as a people. The Lord has not closed heaven to us, but our own course of continual backsliding has separated us from God. Pride, covetousness, and love of the world have lived in the heart without fear of banishment or condemnation. Grievous and presumptuous sins have dwelt among us. And yet the general opinion is that the church is flourishing and that peace and spiritual prosperity are in all her borders.

The church has turned back from following Christ her Leader and is steadily retreating toward Egypt. Yet few are alarmed or astonished at their want of spiritual power. Doubt, and even disbelief of the testimonies of the Spirit of God, is leavening our churches everywhere. Satan would have it thus. Ministers who preach self instead of Christ would have it thus. The testimonies are unread and unappreciated. God has spoken to you. Light has been shining from His word and from the testimonies, and both have been slighted and disregarded. The result is apparent in the lack of purity and devotion and earnest faith among us. **5T 217**

- b. Many of us are losing confidence in the **mighty truths** God was entrusted to us as a people and more than willing to abandon them in order to be more acceptable to other churches

Many of our people do not realize how firmly the foundation of our faith has been laid. My husband, Elder Joseph Bates, Father Pierce, [Older brethren among the pioneers are here thus reminiscently referred to. "Father Pierce" was Stephen Pierce, who served in ministerial and administrative work in the early days. "Father Andrews" was Edward Andrews, the father of J. N. Andrews.—Compilers.] Elder [Hiram] Edson, and others who were keen, noble, and true, were among those who, after the passing of the time in 1844, searched for the truth as for hidden treasure. I met with them, and we studied and prayed earnestly. Often we remained together until late at night, and sometimes through the entire night, praying for light and studying the Word. Again and again these brethren came together to study the Bible, in order that they might know its meaning, and be prepared to teach it with power. When they came to the point in their study where they said, "We can do nothing more," the Spirit of the Lord would come upon me, I would be taken off in vision, and a clear explanation of the passages we had been studying would be given me, with instruction as to how we were to labor and teach effectively. Thus light was given that helped us to understand the scriptures in regard to Christ, His mission, and His priesthood. A line of truth extending from that time to the time when we shall enter the city of God, was made plain to me, and I gave to others the instruction that the Lord had given me. **1SM 206**

- a. The **Sanctuary** truth is not studied and understand because its importance is not seen; the fact that we do not heed the Day of Atonement call to afflict the soul shows that we do not have a correct estimate of the value and seriousness of the sanctuary message
  - b. God's **Law** is made of no effect and trodden down by many in the church who say it cannot be kept; that men will always remain defective
  - c. Many of us are saying that there is nothing special about us as a people; that we are no different than the other churches around us;
19. But just like Esau and old Israel, so many of us do not value the position we have been placed in by divine mandate, and do not appreciate the gifts bestowed upon us as God's privileged church
20. The throne room vision described in Rev 4 and 5 in which John is privileged to see is the same scenario Paul is describing in **Heb 12:22-24**, and it is our privilege as members of the church of the firstborns to be entitled a place in this noble assembly around the throne of God; therefore, let us not short sell our place in God's eternal purposes by selling our birthright

## Two Serious Warnings to Seventh-day Adventists

- 21. By reading this part of **Hebrews 12** and onwards, the Hebrew Christians are presented two stern warnings and these apply to the Seventh-day Adventist church as well:
- 22. **First Warning (Heb 12:16-17)--Do not sell your birthright;** in other words, think twice about giving up your spiritual privileges which has eternal weight of glory; after all, the new covenant which backs up and guarantees those rights and privileges is so much more glorious and more powerful than the old covenant, because Jesus Himself mediates that covenant (**Heb 12:24**)
- 23. **Heb 11:18-24**--The old covenant and its ratification on Mount Sinai is portrayed by Paul as a fearful, dreadful event in which even Moses quaked in abject fear!
- 24. In contrast, the ratification of the new covenant on Mount Zion is presented as a happy, glorious event; in short, there is no comparison between the old and the new covenant! Therefore, to give the

new covenant in favor of the old for the sake of gaining temporary benefit was equivalent to repeating the same mistake Esau did when he sold his birthright for a bowl of lentils!

25. **Second Warning (Heb 12:25-29)**--Do not refuse to listen to the One whose voice speaks from heaven itself, the place of highest authority
- This voice shakes not only the earth, but heaven itself
  - The period of the breaking of the sixth seal ends with the voice of God shaking not only the earth but heaven itself and heaven departs as a scroll (**Rev 6:12-17**)
26. Today, Jesus is speaking to us, not in tones of wrath, but mercy (**Heb 3:7, 15**) and we are admonished to not harden our hearts as the Israelites did in the time of Moses: "Come boldly to the throne of grace" which is a call to follow Jesus by faith into the heavenly sanctuary

## The Lake of Fire

27. **Heb 12:29**—*Our God is a consuming fire*--Those who refuse to heed these warnings will face the wrath of God in the fires of the last day
28. Two lakes of fire
- The first lake of fire:** at the beginning of the Millennium (**Rev 19:20**); consumed by the brightness of the coming of Jesus (**2 Thess 2:8**); the beast and false prophet consumed; only the branches destroyed; incomplete destruction of sin and sinners
  - The second lake of fire:** at the end of the end of the Millennium (**Rev 20:7-10, 15**); the devil himself cast into it; complete destruction of the sin and sinners—root and branch destroyed (**Mal 4:1**)
29. To sell one's **birthright** and refuse the voice of Jesus speaking from the heavenly sanctuary is to end up being burned!
- Firstborn** status changes to "**first to burn**"—the rejecters of God's grace within the church of God are the first ones to burn
    - judgment begins at the house of God (**1 Pet 4:17**)
    - ". . .and begin at my sanctuary" (**Eze 9:6**)

## The Patience of the Saints

30. **Heb 12:28**--*Since we have a kingdom that cannot be moved*—Paul portrays the people of God on earth as if they are already in possession of their eternal inheritance; faith is the substance ("deed of sale") of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen (**Heb 11:1**)
- "**let us have grace**"—better still, let us be thankful and grateful
  - "**let us serve God acceptably**"—show that gratefulness by serving God without murmuring and complaining
  - "**looking unto Jesus, the author and Finisher of our faith**"
    - It is Jesus who **calls us out** of darkness of sin into His marvelous light
    - It is Jesus who **cleanses** us from sin and makes us sons and daughters of God
    - It is Jesus who **justifies and sanctifies** us through his work of atonement in the heavenly sanctuary
    - Finally, it is Jesus who **perfects** our faith and our characters in the final atonement; He carries us all the way to the finish line. . .
  - Hold fast to the profession of our faith without wavering. . .(Heb 10:23)**
  - Cast not away our confidence. . .Live by faith. . . for yet in a little while He that shall come will come and not tarry . . (Heb 10:35-39)**