

(Romans 9:13)

Question: If God truly loves all people, why does the Bible say that He hated Esau?

This is an important and often misunderstood verse. On the surface, it sounds harsh—how could a loving and just God “hate” someone? But to understand this, we must interpret Scripture using sound theology and proper biblical context, not human emotion.

Understanding Romans 9:13

“Just as it is written: ‘Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.’”
— *Romans 9:13*

This verse is actually a quotation from the Old Testament:

“But I have loved Jacob, and Esau I have hated...”

— *Malachi 1:2-3*

Here, “love” and “hate” do not refer to emotions in the way humans often understand them. In biblical Hebrew and New Testament Greek, these words can mean “to choose” or “to favor” versus “to reject” or “not to choose.” This is common in ancient idiomatic expressions.

Theologians describe this as the doctrine of divine election—that God, in His sovereign will, chooses certain people or nations for specific purposes in redemptive history.

“...in order that God’s purpose in election might stand: not by works but by Him who calls.”

— *Romans 9:11-12*

So, when God says He “hated” Esau, it doesn’t mean He wished him evil. Rather, it means He did not choose him as the carrier of the covenant promise (see Genesis 25:23). Jacob was chosen, even before they were born—not because of merit, but because

of God’s sovereign purpose.

God’s Love Is Universal, But His Favor Is Conditional

“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son...”

— *John 3:16*

Yes, God loves the world—meaning all humanity. But not all people receive His covenant blessings, because not all respond to Him in faith and obedience. God is both loving and holy. He loves people but hates sin and rebellion.

Esau’s life reflected a disregard for spiritual things:

“So Esau despised his birthright.”

— *Genesis 25:34*

“See that no one is... godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights.”

— *Hebrews 12:16*

Esau represents those who treat the things of God as worthless. Jacob, though flawed, valued the covenant, and God chose to work through him.

This reinforces the theological truth found in:

“The Lord detests all the proud of heart. Be sure of this: They will not go unpunished.”

— *Proverbs 16:5*

“The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are attentive to their cry.”

— *Psalm 34:15*

Jesus' Teaching Clarifies the Use of “Hate” in Scripture

Jesus used similar language when teaching about discipleship:

“If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children... such a person cannot be my disciple.”

— Luke 14:26

Of course, Jesus wasn't teaching literal hatred. He was emphasizing loyalty to God above all human relationships. The same applies to Romans 9:13—God didn't emotionally hate Esau, but He gave priority to Jacob in His redemptive plan.

The Sovereignty and Justice of God

Paul, in Romans 9, is not just talking about Esau and Jacob as individuals, but also as representative heads of nations—Edom and Israel. God's choice of Jacob (Israel) shows that He is not obligated to choose based on human effort, but based on His mercy.

“I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.”

— *Romans 9:15*

This is not unfairness, but divine sovereignty. God knows all things perfectly and makes decisions based on His righteous will and foreknowledge.

What Does This Mean for Us?

This verse reminds us of a powerful truth:
God is sovereign, and we must not take His grace lightly.

Esau lost his place not because of fate, but because of his own choices. He treated God’s blessings as unimportant and gave them up for temporary satisfaction.

We are warned not to do the same.

“Work out your salvation with fear and trembling.”

— *Philippians 2:12*

“So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!”

— *1 Corinthians 10:12*

Final Thoughts: God’s Desire Is For All to Be Saved

Though God chooses according to His will, He is not unjust. He gives everyone the opportunity to repent and believe.

“The Lord is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

— *2 Peter 3:9*

Let us, then, be like Jacob—not perfect, but willing to value God’s promises. Let’s live lives that please God, fearing Him and

honoring His Word.

Conclusion:

- God’s “hatred” of Esau means rejection or disapproval, not emotional hostility.
- God is loving, but also righteous and sovereign in choosing whom He uses for His purposes.
- Esau’s life reminds us of the danger of taking spiritual matters lightly.
- We must respond to God’s grace with faith, reverence, and obedience.

Come, Lord Jesus.
(1 Corinthians 16:22)

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