A Portrait of Esav

Introduction

Esav the Enigma

Frequently, the Torah simply recounts events without pronouncing explicit moral judgment on the characters involved. In cases where the circumstances are hazy and details are scant, the reader must then struggle to piece together assorted (and sometimes contradictory) clues in order to reveal the lessons and meanings of the characters and their stories.

Esav is a case in point. The Torah tells us very little about his deeds and makes no definitive character evaluation. A cursory survey of the data seems to show that much of the evidence the Torah does provide is, at most, equivocal:

- Bereshit 25:27 states that Esav was a hunter ("אִישׁ יֹדֵעַ צַיִד"). Is this an implied critique of Esav's choice of profession,[1] or might it even be praise for his talents?
- In Bereshit 25:34, we read how Yaakov persuaded Esav to sell his birthright and how Esav then disdained it. Was there a moral failing in this episode? If yes, was it on the part of Esav or Yaakov?[2]
- Bereshit 26:34-35 notes that Esav married two Hittite women who caused grief to both of his parents.[3] Yet, Bereshit 28:8-9 also records that when Esav realized this, he tried to rectify the situation by marrying a daughter of Yishmael.[4]
- In Bereshit 27:41, the Torah tells us that, in his anger over the stealing of his blessing, Esav contemplated killing Yaakov. Had Esav attempted to execute this plan, it would undoubtedly have been a heinous act, but it is far from clear that he ever tried.[5] And can one blame him for being furious not only at being swindled, but also at having his father add insult to injury by giving a second blessing to Yaakov?
- When decades later, Yaakov returns to Canaan in Bereshit 32-33, Esav comes to greet him accompanied by a group of 400 men. One possible reading is that Esav was bringing an army in order to attack Yaakov. But if so, why would he instead embrace and kiss him?

To sum up, while the Torah may present Esav as a somewhat coarse character, it is much more questionable whether it views Esav as a wicked or even negative person. And while Hashem makes plain His own endorsement of the choice of Yaakov to be the next patriarch (and this surely is a factor which motivates some exegetes to find faults in Esav),[6] it is not so obvious why Esav was rejected.[7]

Parents Playing Favorites

Sefer Bereshit is replete, from beginning to end, with sibling rivalry and parental favoritism. Yet, the story of Yaakov and Esav and their relationships with their parents stands out, as it is a case where despite the brothers sharing the same father and a mother, each parent favors a different child. These preferences are proclaimed already at the very outset of the narrative in Bereshit 25:

(כח) וַיֶּאֱהַב יִצְחָק אֶת עֵשָׂו כִּי צַיִד בְּפִיו וְרִבְקָה אֹהֶבֶת אֶת יַעֲקֹב.

(28) And Yitzchak loved Esav, because he ate of his hunting, and Rivka loved Yaakov.

These predilections come to the fore again, in the story of the blessings. While Yitzchak planned to bless Esav, Rivka ensured through deceitful measures that Yaakov was blessed.

- What is the meaning of "כִּי צַיִד בְּפִיו"? Was Yitzchak's most important consideration purely gastronomical?
- What led each parent to favor a different son? Was Yitzchak wholly unaware of or apathetic to Rivka's considerations?[8]
- Why does Hashem ratify Yaakov's blessings if they were obtained through chicanery? Could it be that this was only a *de facto* recognition? Given Hashem's confirmation, how are we to understand Yitzchak's original plan to bestow them upon Esav?

Hashem's Choice and Historical Esav

While Hashem does select Yaakov to be the father of the chosen nation, the Torah never discloses His opinion of Esav. The prophecy of Malakhi, though, is much more blunt, opening with the following statement:

(ב) אָהַבְתִּי אֶתְכֶם אָמַר ה׳ וַאֲמַרְתֶּם בַּמָּה אֲהַבְתָּנוּ הֲלוֹא אָח עֵשָׂו לְיַעֲקֹב נְאֻם ה׳ וָאֹהַב אֶת יַעֲקֹב. (ג) וְאֶת עֵשָׂו שָׂנֵאתִי וָאָשִׂים אֶת הָרָיו שְׁמָמָה וְאֶת נַחֲלָתוֹ לְתַנּוֹת מִדְבָּר.

(2) You have been loved by me, said Hashem. But you say, Where was your love for us? Was not Esav Yaakov's brother? Said Hashem: and Yaakov was loved by me. (3) But Esav I hated, and I made his mountains a desolation, and I gave his inheritance to the jackals of the wilderness.

According to Malakhi, Hashem loves Yaakov but hates Esav. However, Malakhi does not explain what caused this preference. Additionally, is this prophecy speaking of Esav the individual, or is it merely using his name as a symbol for the nation of Edom with whom there was historical strife and enmity?

Significantly, Esav as a symbol lived on long after his genetic descendants had blended into the pool of nations. From the Idumeans during the Hasmonean period, through the Romans, and continuing to Christianity, Esav remained as the archetype of Israel's sworn enemy. Undoubtedly, these associations influenced many of the approaches of the commentators throughout the generations.

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[1] While various commentators understand this description to connote a trapping and deceitful mind, there is little basis for this in a literal reading of the verse.

[2] For elaboration, see Sale of the Birthright.

[3] Both Yitzchak and Yaakov are careful not to marry a Canaanite woman. However, it is unclear that Esav's nuptials were a violation of any prohibition. For further discussion, see Wanted: A Wife for Yitzchak and Avraham's Many Wives.

[4] Although Esav does not rid himself of his original wives, he seems to be making an attempt to correct his mistake, or at least to improve for the future.

[5] Jubilees and various Midrashim describe how Esav himself or his sons later attempt to kill Yaakov, but the Torah gives no indication that this ever happened.

[6] This is explicit in the Beit El revelation in Bereshit 28.

[7] This is not such an anomaly in the Torah. When Hashem favors Hevel's offering over Kayin's and when Yitzchak is selected instead of Yishmael, the Torah does not explicitly say that this was due to the righteous conduct of the chosen or reprehensible behavior of the rejected.

[8] Additionally, if Esav truly was completely wicked, how could it be that Yitzchak and Rivka raised such a child while failing to exert any positive influence on him. Could Yitzchak really have been totally blind to Esav's behavior? Does not Bereshit 26:34-35 make plain that Yitzchak, too was displeased with Esav's way of life?

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Exegetical Approaches

Neutral

Esav was a mostly neutral character, with neither great attributes nor great faults.

SOURCES: Josephus, Rashbam, R. Yosef Bekhor Shor

***In utero* –** These sources understand the movement of the twins ("וַיִּתְרֹצְצוּ") to be the regular fetal exertions of babies,[1] exacerbated due to the fact that there were two. They do not suggest that it revealed anything about the character of the brothers themselves, despite the Torah's stating that it was symbolic of the future struggles between their two nations.

"אַדְמוֹנִי כֻּלּוֹ כְּאַדֶּרֶת שֵׂעָר" – According to these sources, this is just an external description of Esav which had no bearing on his inner qualities. Josephus, interestingly, makes no mention of Esav's redness, perhaps due to the negative connotations often associated with it in antiquity.[2]

"אִישׁ יֹדֵעַ צַיִד אִישׁ שָׂדֶה" – These sources do not read into these terms a description of Esav's character, apparently understanding them to simply be a statement of his occupation,[3] carrying no negative connotation.[4]

Contrast between the brothers – Josephus omits the contrast entirely, perhaps to ensure that one not be drawn to make a negative evaluation of Esav based on the foil to Yaakov's innocence.[5]

Scorning the birthright – Most of these sources do not find Esav's scorning of the birthright problematic and view it neither as a foolhardy dismissal of a lofty status, nor as a rejection of Hashem:

- **Life over money –** R"Y Bekhor Shor assumes that Esav was literally on the verge of death when he sold his birthright, and thus he does not fault him for his actions, pointing out that Esav rightfully recognized that all the money in the world is not worth one's life.[6] Josephus goes even further, portraying Esav as the victim and Yaakov as taking advantage of his hunger to force him into the sale.[7]
- **Logical deal –** Rashbam also assumes that Esav's actions were understandable, believing as he did that he might very well die before his father due to the dangers involved in hunting. In addition, Rashbam asserts that Yaakov paid for the birthright not just with the stew but with actual money. Thus, Esav was not throwing away the birthright for nothing.[8]

Esav's marriage – This approach might suggest that though Esav erred in marrying Hittite wives,[9] when he realized that this was against his parents' wishes, he took an additional wife from Avraham's family in order to please them.

Yaakov and Esav's reunion – According to Josephus and Rashbam, Esav was happy to see Yaakov and was bringing 400 men as an honor guard. As evidence, Rashbam points to Esav's embrace of his brother in chapter 33.[10]

Yitzchak's preference for Esav – None of these sources elaborate on the reasons for Yitzchak's preference for Esav, perhaps because they do not find it surprising that he might do so. If Esav is not a

negative character, but provides for Yitzchak and is his first born, there would be no reason for Yitzchak not to love him or bless him. R"Y Bekhor Shor even suggests that Yitzchak knew of the sale of the birthright and decided to bless Esav before his death so that he could evade paying the consequences of his action.

Esav's descendants – While the association of Esav and Rome might have motivated numerous Midrashic sources (see below) to paint a negative picture of Esav, the same connection had the opposite effect on Josephus, a Roman lackey. He was loathe to denigrate his superiors, and thus paints a far more neutral portrait of the Biblical character.[11]

Negative

Esav was an unworthy character with several faults, but he was not wicked or implicated in terrible crimes.[12]

SOURCES: Ibn Ezra, Radak, R. Avraham b. HaRambam, Ramban, Ralbag, Shadal

***In utero* –** These commentators do not read into the fetal movement any significance for the character of Esav himself. It only foreshadowed the future rivalry between the brothers and their future nations.

"אִישׁ יֹדֵעַ צַיִד אִישׁ שָׂדֶה" – Most of these sources suggest that this description sheds negative light on Esav's character:

- **Deceitful –** Ibn Ezra, Ralbag, and Shadal[13] see in Esav's chosen profession a sign of his devious nature, since the way of a hunter is to catch his prey by traps and cunning.
- **Power hungry –** R. Avraham b. HaRambam compares this phrase to the similar one by Nimrod, "הוּא הָיָה גִּבֹּר צַיִד", and asserts that it connotes one who chases power and wealth.[14]
- **Physical –** Radak more simply asserts that Esav chose a worldly path rather than a spiritual one marked by wisdom, while Shadal suggests that "אִישׁ שָׂדֶה" refers to a toughened man of the wilderness.

Scorning the birthright – These commentators differ in their evaluation of Esav's actions during the sale:

- **Neutral –** Ibn Ezra and Shadal do not fault Esav for scorning the birthright, claiming that Esav thought it likely that he would die before his father.[15] Ibn Ezra adds that the birthright was not worth much in any case, as Yitzchak was poor.[16] Thus, Esav's willingness to sell it was very understandable.[17] Shadal even points out that Esav, on his own, kept his side of the deal, moving to Seir and leaving Canaan to be inherited by his brother.
- **Negative –** Ramban asserts that Esav's action betrayed his need for immediate gratification, saying that he acted as a fool who thinks only of the moment and not the future. Radak similarly points to his gluttony, while R. Avraham faults his disregard for the spiritual.

Esav's marriage – Radak and R. Avraham Maimonides suggest that, in marrying at forty, Esav was attempting to emulate his father. Nonetheless, these sources fault him for not consulting with his parents or realizing on his own that the marriage was problematic.[18] Ramban points out that even when Esav corrects his mistake by marrying into Yishmael's family, he does so only halfheartedly, for he neither divorces his first wives nor goes to his mother's family to find a new wife.

Yaakov and Esav's reunion – Most of these sources[19] assume that Esav went to greet Yaakov with evil intent, but that he was appeased by the gifts and Yaakov's show of subservience. Radak goes further to say

that he forgave Yaakov and was filled with feelings of mercy towards him.[20]

Yitzchak's preference for Esav

- **No preference –** Radak suggests that, in reality, Yitzchak loved Yaakov more than Esav; the verse is simply saying that the *only* reason he liked Esav was due to the food he brought him. He similarly chose to bless him, not because he was deserving and more beloved, but precisely because he was not and thus needed the blessing more than Yaakov.[21]
- **Unaware of true nature** - Ralbag asserts that Yitzchak was not aware of Esav's faults since Esav would deceive him. When he discovered that Yaakov was more worthy, he switched his allegiance.[22]
- **First born and food supplier** - Ibn Ezra, Ramban, and Shadal assert that Yitzchak's preference was related to the fact that he brought him delicacies, as the simple reading of the verse suggests. Ramban further asserts that Yitzchak meant to give Esav the blessing of Avraham[23] since he was the firstborn.[24] As these commentators do not posit that Esav had any grievous faults, Yitzchak's thoughts were quite natural.

Esav's descendants

Wicked

Esav was a wicked and deceitful character who rejected Hashem, committed heinous crimes and was unworthy of being Yitzchak's spiritual heir.

SOURCES: Jubilees, Philo, Targumim, Bavli Bava Batra, Bereshit Rabbah, Pesikta DeRav Kahana, Tanchuma, R. Saadia Gaon, Rashi, Minchat Yehuda, Ran, Abarbanel, Sforno, R. S"R Hirsch, Malbim

***In utero* –** According to Bereshit Rabbah and Rashi, Esav displayed his wicked tendencies even while he was still *in utero*. Whenever Rivka passed a house of idolatry, he would push forward in the womb,[25] drawn to worship there. R. Yochanan and Resh Lakish further suggest that the fetal movements were attempts on the part of the fetuses to kill or overpower one another, and that Esav's personal animosity towards Yaakov began even before they were born.[26]

"אַדְמוֹנִי כֻּלּוֹ כְּאַדֶּרֶת שֵׂעָר" – According to many, the description of Esav's external appearance is indicative of internal failings as well. R. Abba b. Kahana in Bereshit Rabbah and Rashi maintain that the term "אַדְמוֹנִי" denotes one who spills blood. Abarbanel explains similarly, and further suggests that hairiness, too, is associated with a nature of cruelty and anger. Malbim, instead associates redness with cruelty and the hairiness with an intellectual and moral deficit.

"אִישׁ יֹדֵעַ צַיִד אִישׁ שָׂדֶה" – Many of these sources understand this phrase as describing Esav's character rather than his profession:[27]

- **Trickster –** Bereshit Rabbah, Tanchuma, Rashi, Abarbanel,[28] and R. Hirsch assert that the words "אִישׁ יֹדֵעַ צַיִד" refer to one who is deceitful and traps (צד) people[29] with his words.[30]
- **Murderer –** Targum Yerushalmi (Yonatan) makes Esav even more wicked, suggesting that the phrase teaches that Esav killed people as well as animals.[31] Jubilees similarly suggests that he learned the art of war.
- **Asocial –** Abarbanel asserts that the term "אִישׁ שָׂדֶה" refers to one who distances himself from society.[32]

Contrast between the brothers

- **Black and white –** Many of these sources portray the twins as total opposites, making Esav the wicked counterpart of the righteous Yaakov. Abarbanel goes as far as to suggest that all the negative traits inherited from Rivka's deceitful ancestors were passed to Esav, while all the positive traits from Avraham's side went to Yaakov.
- **Potentially equal –** R. Hirsch asserts that the fact that the two brothers had such different natures in and of itself did not mean that one was to follow a path or righteousness while the other turned away from such a path.[33] Esav's traits of energetic strength and courage, and even his cunning, could all have been harnessed for the good, had his parents recognized these and taught him according to his nature. The fact that they did not is what led to his downfall.

"וַיָּבֹא עֵשָׂו מִן הַשָּׂדֶה וְהוּא עָיֵף" – Most of the Midrashic sources[34] and Targum Yerushalmi (Yonatan) find hints in this clause at two cardinal sins of Esav, both murder and illicit relations.[35]

"הִנֵּה אָנֹכִי הוֹלֵךְ לָמוּת" – Most of these sources[36] read into these words, not just a personal assessment, but a theological denial of the principles of the Resurrection of the Dead or the World to Come.

Scorning the birthright – According to Rashi and Sforno, the birthright earned one the privilege to act as priest in serving Hashem. Thus, in rejecting it, Esav was in effect scorning Hashem.[37] R. Hirsch points out that this was Esav's general tendency, to always give up the spiritual for material gain. Abarbanel goes further, depicting an Esav who did not believe that Hashem was going to fulfill His promise and give the Land of Israel to Avraham's descendants.[38]

Esav's marriage – Jubilees, Targum Yerushalmi (Yonatan), and Rashi all assert that Esav married idolaters, and this is why they were a source of distress to his parents. Jubilees adds that they were full of fornication and debauchery, without any righteousness.

Leah's "tender eyes" – Rashi understands that Leah's eyes were tender due to the many tears she shed as she mistakenly assumed that it was her lot to marry the evil Esav. This reading is consistent with Rashi's negative view of Esav's character.[39]

Yaakov and Esav's reunion

- According to most of these sources, Esav went to greet Yaakov with an army of 400 men, intent to battle his brother.[40] Many of the Midrashic sources and Targumim further suggest that Esav's kiss upon greeting Yaakov was insincere, and rather an attempt to bite his brother.
- Jubilees does not depict the reunion, but instead has Esav's clan convince him, after his parents' death, to actively attempt to eliminate Yaakov.[41]

Yitzchak's preference for Esav

- **Unaware of wickedness –** According to many of these sources, Yitzchak was unaware of Esav's true nature, either because Esav tricked him into believing he was righteous,[42] or because he had a natural love for his eldest son and was convinced of his bravery and strength by his tales of hunting.[43] R. Hirsch adds that often people are attracted to their opposites, so Esav's active nature appealed to Yitzchak, and he did not see beyond to the negatives that lay beneath.
- **No preference for Esav –** According to Sforno, the verse is not saying that Yitzchak preferred Esav, but rather that he loved him also[44] (in contrast to Rivka who loved only Yaakov).[45]

- **Split the blessing –** Malbim suggests that Yitzchak was aware of his son's ways[46] and had never intended to give him the blessing of Avraham, but only a material blessing. He thought that both his children would be partners. Yaakov would devote his life to service of Hashem, while Esav would provide for all his physical needs.[47]

Esav's descendants – Esav's descendants, Amalek and Edom (later associated with Rome and Christianity), have come to represent the arch-enemies of Israel throughout the ages. It is not surprising, then, that many might have been inclined to view their ancestor, Esav, as evil. Moreover, Midrashic literature which consistently associated Esav with their contemporary enemy, Rome, was especially likely to adopt a harsh reading of Esav.

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[1] Josephus only alludes to the struggle in the womb in his words, "her belly was greatly burdened", perhaps hesitant to speak openly about the struggle between Israel and Esav=Rome. L. Feldman, *Josephus' Interpretation of the Bible* (Los Angeles, 1999): 314-324, notes that, throughout his work, Josephus was faced with a great dilemma in deciding how to portray the character of Esav. In this era (according to Feldman; not all agree) Esav was already associated with Rome and Josephus could not antagonize his Roman audience by denigrating his character. Yet the Biblical text obviously rejects Esav in favor of Yaakov. Thus, he walked an exegetical "tightrope", attempting to neither extol one nor belittle the other.
In Josephus' reporting of the prophecy received by Rivka this tension is already manifest. He chooses to write that "the younger will excel the older" rather than "the older shall serve the younger" so as not to imply that Rome will inevitably be weaker than Judea. In light of Rome's recent victory, this would have sounded absurd to his readers.

[2] See above that Josephus was wary of antagonizing his Roman patrons by painting a negative portrait of Esav. L. Feldman (see above note) points out that, in Roman society, red hair was a sign of servitude, with many slaves depicted as redheaded and called Rufus (red).

[3] Rashbam similarly explains that Yaakov was simply a shepherd, not a Torah scholar sitting in the tents of the Beit Midrash (cf. Midrashim below).

[4] Cf. Y. Bin-Nun, "קול יעקב – ידי עשו", who views it in a positive light. Like R. Avraham b. HaRambam below, he notes the parallel to the description of Nimrod: "הוּא הָיָה גִּבֹּר צַיִד לִפְנֵי ה'" in Bereshit 10:9, and suggests that in both cases it means a great warrior. He suggests that Yitzchak looked favorably on this trait and recognized its benefits in warding off the Philistines and other enemies.

[5] Rashbam and R"Y Bekhor Shor's understanding of the verse to focus on the brothers' professions has a similar effect.

[6] For elaboration, see Sale of the Birthright – A Fair Deal.

[7] Josephus, perhaps aware that some readers would view the willingness to sell a birthright as a fault, omits mention of the fact that "Esav scorned the birthright". In addition, he glosses over the story as a whole, including it only after the recording of the death of Yitzchak, as an appendix which comes to explain the origins of the name "Edom".

[8] Nonetheless, Rashbam does point out that afterwards Esav regretted his decision, proving that he did act somewhat impetuously. See Sale of the Birthright – A Fair Deal.

[9] Josephus attempts to mitigate this action as well, noting that Esav acted without the permission or approval of his father, but omitting that the wives were a source of bitterness for his parents.

[10] Rashbam goes as far as to suggest that Yaakov's unwarranted fear of his brother and attempts to flee were punished. See Wrestling With Angels and Men.

[11] This factor did not impact Rashbam or R"Y Bekhor Shor, who instead were motivated by a desire to adhere to the simple sense of the text.

[12] The sources below range in their evaluation of Esav, with Ibn Ezra, Ramban, and Shadal viewing him as only mildly negative, and Radak and Ralbag viewing him as much worse.

[13] Shadal suggests that this is the implication of the contrast to Yaakov's innocence. He does note, though, that Yaakov, too, was at times deceitful. But he asserts that one can still be called upright if one uses guile to be saved from those who want to harm you or the like. However, one whose entire occupation revolves around setting snares can no longer be seen as an "אִישׁ תָּם".

[14] Nimrod is the first person described to rule over a vast kingdom, so R. Avraham understands his description as a "גִּבֹּר צַיִד" to be related to this role as ruler.

[15] Due to the dangers involved in hunting, Esav assumed that he might die an early death. Cf. Rashbam above.

[16] See Sale of the Birthright – A Fair Deal for a discussion of Ibn Ezra's thesis and Ramban's numerous arguments against it.

[17] Ralbag explains similarly but nonetheless thinks that Esav was wrong not to value it.

[18] Shadal adds that Rivka is referred to superfluously as the "mother of Yaakov and Esav" (28:5) to imply that as her son, he should have known better than to marry against her will and cause her distress. In contrast to the approach below, though, none of these exegetes say that the wives were idolaters.

[19] Shadal asserts that it is not clear what Esav's true intentions were. It is possible that he harbored no more resentment and was coming to honor Yaakov, but nonetheless Yaakov was naturally fearful when he heard that Esav was accompanied by 400 men.

[20] In his very next comment, though, he brings the Midrash which discusses the Masoretic dots above the word "וַיִּשָּׁקֵהוּ" and mentions both understandings of the phenomenon, that it either emphasizes Esav's sincerity or his lack thereof. Radak does not choose between the two options, though his earlier comment would fit better with the first explanation.

[21] According to Radak, the blessing given was not the legacy of Avraham, which would automatically go to the deserving child, but a more material blessing. Yitzchak assumed that both sons were to blessed, Yaakov with the spiritual blessing of ברכת אברהם, and Esav with a physical one. Cf. Malbim above who explains similarly and develops this idea.

[22] This is why he tells Yaakov to marry from within the family.

[23] Shadal disagrees, suggesting that Yitzchak assumed that both brothers would share the blessing of Avraham, and that Yitzchak was simply planning on giving his beloved an extra blessing of dominion.

[24] He assumes that only Rivka had heard the prophecy that "the elder will serve the younger" and that she did not share it with her husband.

[25] This is the Midrashic understanding of the phrase, "וַיִּתְרֹצְצוּ הַבָּנִים בְּקִרְבָּהּ".

[26] It should be noted, though, that according to these sages the attempts are two-sided. Both brothers try to kill or overpower the other, and so the statement is not meant to vilify Esav as much as to portray the eternal battle between the siblings.

[27] On a textual level, the fact that Yaakov is described by two terms, one of which describes his nature ("אִישׁ תָּם") and one which supplies his profession ("יֹשֵׁב אֹהָלִים"), might have led commentators to suggest that the

parallel two terms by Esav must also speak of both his character and his profession.

[28] It is unclear from Abarbanel if he thinks the words are a metaphor, or if he assumes that Esav chose the hunting profession since it was suited to his deceitful nature.

[29] R. Hirsch does not read the phrase in this manner but rather suggests Esav's very essence was that of a hunter who stalks his prey, insidious and full of cunning.

[30] The Tanchuma describes how he would trick his father into believing that he was God-fearing by asking questions about even the minutiae of legal practice, such as the laws of tithing salt. See Bereshit Rabbah which similarly interprets "וְיַעֲקֹב אִישׁ תָּם יֹשֵׁב אֹהָלִים" in an non-literal way, asserting that Yaakov was a fixture in the Beit Midrash.

[31] See above that some assume that the term "אַדְמוֹנִי" also refers to this murderous trait.

[32] R. Hiyya in Bereshit Rabbah instead suggests that Esav "הפקיר עצמו כשדה". See Rashi who explains similarly, describing Esav as a loafer.

[33] Radak notes that even the original prophecy of the "וְרַב יַעֲבֹד צָעִיר" is ambiguous. Without the identifying "את" it is unclear whether it should read, "the elder shall serve the younger" or "the elder, shall the younger serve".

[34] Rashi follows partially in their interpretation, mentioning murder but not rape.

[35] As evidence, they point to Devarim 22:25 where the laws of raping an engaged woman speak of it occurring "בַּשָּׂדֶה" and to Yirmeyahu 4:31 which mentions being "עיף" in connection to killing.

[36] See Bavli Bava Batra, the various Targumim, Bereshit Rabbah, R. Saadia Gaon, and Malbim.

[37] See Sale of the Birthright – A Fair Deal for a fuller discussion of this position. R. Saadia does not explain exactly what the birthright constituted, but he also views the sale as evidence of Esav's misplaced priorities: "בא לגנות את עשו שמכר במחיר נמוך כזה את המעלה הרמה". Bavli Bava Batra and Targum Yerushalmi (Yonatan) similarly view the rejection as a sin, but do not elaborate.

[38] Regarding this position and its development by Lekach Tov and Abarbanel, see Sale of the Birthright – A Fair Deal.

[39] Rashbam, in contrast, understands the verse to mean that Leah's eyes were pretty. As he does not assume that Esav was wicked, he has no reason to associate the description of Leah's eyes with crying.

[40] Abarbanel may be an exception. He presents Yaakov's messengers as assuming that Esav's entourage was a show of respect to his brother, but Yaakov himself understanding it to be a gathering for war. It is unclear from Abarbanel who was correct and what Esav's intentions actually were.

[41] This is presumably related to Esav's thoughts in Bereshit 27:41 that when the mourning of his father passes he will kill Yaakov. According to Jubilees, the attack ends with Esav dying at Yaakov's hands and a sweeping victory for Yaakov who then puts his brother's men into servitude.

[42] See Targum Yerushalmi (Yonatan), Tanchuma, Rashi, and R. Hirsch who explain that "כִּי צַיִד בְּפִיו" refers to tricking Yitzchak with his words. Bereshit Rabbah seems to suggest, instead, that through feeding Yitzchak, he gained his favor.

[43] This is how Abarbanel explains the term "כִּי צַיִד בְּפִיו"; Esav's mouth was filled with stories of his hunting. Malbim and R. Hirsch raise this possibility as well.

[44] See Radak above who explains similarly.

[45] Sforno does agree, though, that Yitzchak did not appreciate the full level of Esav's wickedness, and that he even contributed to it by not disciplining him.

[46] Malbim suggests that it was Esav's marriage which allowed Yitzchak to see that his son was unworthy.

[47] See N. Guttman, "הקל קול יעקב והידים ידי עשו", Megadim 21 (5754): 17-22 who develops this approach.