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# THE MINDSET OF THE PATRIARCH JACOB AND HIS ANTIPODE BROTHER ESAU

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What precisely distinguishes people who excel and flourish in life and at what they do from those who continuously struggle and suffer in life? Where do people's abilities and successes come from? Investigating these complicated issues, many contemporary psychologists, psychiatrists, neurologists, and researchers of human behavior argue that the physical health of a person, his morality, and his internal aspirations strongly affect the thinking of a person and, as a result, his behaver. Scholars believe that it is happening because man's thinking or consciousness is a value system that guides how people deal with each specific situation, or how people understand what is happening around them and what they should do in a given moment. For that reason, modern scientists, as theologians from time immemorial, began to believe that human behavior can be improved by enlightening consciousness. This article is aiming to explore what does the Bible says about human consciousness? Is it true that the consciousness of people determines their being, or, conversely, their social being determines their consciousness? It is noteworthy that for millennia the Holy Bible has taught that the life of any person can be "transformed by the renewal of the mind". The Scriptures also teach that man's behavior will gradually be changed by "renewed in the spirit of [his] mind". In the outstanding case of the biblical Esau and Jacob, Hebrew and Christian theologians always note that both of these twins came from the same womb, had the same parents and an identical environment. On the other hand, they (Esau and Jacob) are truly worlds apart. This research paper depicted how through the history, Hebrew and Christian communities viewed and interpreted the life of carnal Esau and the righteous Patriarch Jacob. Nevertheless, the main goal of this study is to show from a theological point of view how human desire, mindset and free will influence human behavior and predetermined the outcome of man's life.

*Key words:* The book of Genesis; human consciousness; will; internal aspirations; updating the mind; the Patriarch Jacob; the meaning of Jacob's name; the carnal Esau; Jewish and Christian theologians.

**Introduction.** In the Bible, Esau, as a hunter, is presented as a one greatly concerned with earthly and material objects and perishable food. On the other hand, the Patriarch Jacob occupied with work and schooling, is passionate in his pursuit of spiritual knowledge. These differences between Esau and Jacob show that one cares for the temporary, and one cares for the eternal. An outstanding, well-known example of the exchange of Esau's birthright is the culmination of two different natures among the brothers, formed by their inner desire, believe, and free will. As it echoes the elements of the fall, the stories of Esau and Jacob relates to audiences that to be an antipode of righteousness is to be in neglect of the Lord and heavenly considerations.

The purpose of the article to explore what does the Bible says about human consciousness. Is it true that the consciousness of people determines their being, or, conversely, their social being determines their consciousness.

Statement of the main material. According to the biblical narrative, at the age of forty, the Patriarch Isaac married Rebekah by the providence of the Lord God. Rebekah (*Rivkah* / רָבְקָּה) was his relative from Mesopotamia (Genesis 24:1–5). According to the Scriptures, she was a very beautiful, respectful, hardworking, and generous woman. The narrator, concerned much

more about the moral standard of Isaac's future lineage, highlights that Rebekah was a virgin who had never slept with a man (Genesis 24:16–25). Through all the rabbinic literature, Rebekah is regularly represented as an honorable, righteous woman who was well suited for her exceptional assignment as the next matriarch of a faithful people [23, p. 46]. Similarly, the ancient Christians understood the mother Rebekah as a metaphorical representation of the church and her husband Isaac as a representation of Christ [17, p. 147]. Theologians likewise believe that the narrator portrays Rebekah as yet another "Abraham," called by the Lord God to leave her home and become an important vessel of God in the process of bringing blessings to all of humanity [12, p. 334, 340].

During her much desired pregnancy, Rebekah learns that "[her] babies jostled each other within her [womb], and she wonders, 'Why is this happening to me'" (Genesis 25:22)? The Hebrew word [ratsats], a close equivalent to the English word "struggled," represents the idea that the children had been constantly fighting in the mother's womb until the day of their birth. The early Church read and interpreted this struggle in her womb as the conflict between evil and good. In this case Rebekah "represents the Church, and the infants depict the struggles of the righteous and the wicked within the Church" [11, p. 380]. The unceasing fight occurring within Rebekah was not easy to endure. In order to seek relief, Rebekah went to inquire of the Lord God under whose blessing she was able to conceive. The Lord revealed to Rebekah that "Two [antagonistic] nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger." (Genesis 25:23).

According to the Midrash Rabbah, Esau was the one who stretched out against his youngest brother Jacob, wanting to kill him even while still in the mother's womb. When describing Esau the psalmist proclaims "the wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies. Their poison is like the poison of a serpent" (Psalm 58:3–4) [13, p. 569]. In addition, Hebrew commentators argue that God foresaw the future and revealed to Rebekah that Jacob and his offspring would serve the Creator of the universe and that Esau and his descendants would worship idols [36, p. 1055]. Ancient believers were sure that Rebekah fully understood the oracle of God, and in light of this revelation, she also understood her role in maintaining the unique line of righteous people through which the Messiah should come. For example, Saint Ambrose praised Rebekah's obedience and faithfulness to God's revelation [2, p. 149]. Similarly, Quodvultdeus, Bishop of Carthage, taught that Rebekah's behavior was "divinely-inspired" [25, p. 169]. At the beginning of his colorful career, John Calvin also maintains the view that "Rebekah chiefly in earnest respecting the blessing of God, the conjecture is probable, that she had been induced, by divine authority, to prefer the younger to the first-born" [4, p. 50].

When Rebekah gave birth to two twin boys, the first child to come out was red and his parents named him Esau because his whole body was like a hairy garment (Genesis 25:25). In his philosophical works, Philo of Alexandria presents an ancient understanding that "the ruddy body and the hairy hide are a sign of a savage man who rages furiously in the manner of a wild beast" [8, p. 446]. According to early Jewish tradition, "Esau [insistently] identifies more specifically with the evil serpent (hivya'bisha), who is the most cunning of all beasts" [26, p. 218]. Therefore, even the latest comments on the book of Genesis undoubtedly indicate that "Esau's hairiness symbolizes his wild nature" [31, p. 358].

At their birth, "the twin brother came out, and his hand took hold of Esau's heel; therefore his name was called Jacob" (Genesis 25:26). Considering how the babies previously jostled each other within their mother's womb, ancient believers were convinced that Esau, while fighting Jacob, acted like a chick of a common cuckoo, which always kills other eggs or chicks in the nest to monopolize all dominion [6, p. 173]. In light of this, Jacob had the clear deontological right to protect himself, and so he grasped Esau's heel to avoid a deadly strike from his own brother.

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On this matter, Philo of Alexandria maintains that to be able to seize and hold Esau's heel shows the strength and moral excellence of Jacob's character, as well as the weak character of him who is seized [9, p. 448].

Consequently, when the parents saw that the second baby came out holding Esau's heel they started to understand the much deeper spiritual and social levels of God's forewarning to Rebekah. "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger" (Genesis 25:23). In conjunction, Isaac and Rebekah certainly remembered how the elder brother Cain killed his younger brother Abel during the fight that he [Cain] started, and how the oldest Ishmael mocked his younger brother. Therefore, Isaac named his youngest son Jacob – the Hebrew יַעֶּקֹב (Ya'aqov). It is a shortened from of the theophoric name עין יעקב (Ya'agov-el), which means "May God Protect (You)". The Hebrew community throughout the centuries has upheld an exceedingly respectful view of the Patriarch Jacob and his personal name without any shadow of negativism. Therefore, the Jewish Study Bible emphasizes that "the name Jacob derives from 'y-'-k-b-'-l," which means "may God protect" [30, p. 49]. Likewise according to The JPS Torah Commentary, "Hebrew ya'akov stems from a Semitic root '-k-v, 'to protect.' It is an abbreviation from a fuller form with a divine name or epithet as its subject. Ya 'akov-'el, 'May El protect,' is a divine name that has turned up several times in cuneiform texts over a wide area" [22, p. 180].

It is notable that the biblical text says nothing about the childhood of Esau and Jacob. However, ancient believers assumed that both children had equal opportunity and access to food, clothing, shelter, moral support, and education. The Midrash Rabbah supports this view by highlighting the fundamental rabbinic affirmation that Esau and Jacob had the identical chances and for the first thirteen years of their life both of them went to school [14, p. 565]. Regarding education, it is also important to address that during the first fifteen years of life both boys had exceptional opportunities to play, walk, and learn directly from their great grandfather Abraham, the man who was called God's friend (Isaiah 41:8; James 2:23). Knowing the faithfulness of Abraham, it can be supposed that the patriarch Abraham taught Esau and Jacob the whole truth about God, the creation of the world, the fall of the first people because they preferred earthly food to God's obedience, and the promise of restoration of the creation order through the righteous offspring of Abraham, which must bring blessings upon every human tribe. Knowing the unique calling of their family and their covenantal relationship with the Lord God through the ceremonial circumcision that was previously revealed to Abraham's family (Genesis 17:1-27), both Esau and Jacob should have stepped into adulthood with a full understanding of God's will and discernment between right and wrong.

Based on collective historical data, scholars and theologians agree that the expression 'the boys grew' – the Hebrew נְדֵל נַעַר (na`ar gadal) literally means that boys had been welcomed into the world of Jewish adulthood through the ceremony of the Bar Mitzvah (Genesis 25:27). The term 'Bar Mitzvah' literally means "son of the mitzvah", or one who is obligated to observe God's Law. According to the ancient Jewish custom, at the age of thirteen each boy is completely responsible to fulfill God's commandments as a duty. The Bar Mitzvah Book emphasizes that when an individual "has entered the adult world where, as a Jew, a specific code of behavior must govern his actions, actions which give him a great responsibility and for which he himself is now answerable" [18, p. 25]. Taking this information into consideration, the ancient reader understood that the colorful depictions of the inner beings of Esau and Jacob in verses 27 and 28 is separated by many years from verse 26, which mainly talks about their birth. Thus, following verse 27, the narrator describes two grown adults who are completely responsible for their actions. Then, the author differentiates their inner characters and unique desires in life by saying that "Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was an upright [perfect] man, remaining in the tents" (Genesis 25:27 JUB). It is obvious that through this elegantly concise narrative the author started to deeply identify Esau and Jacob and their precise directions of life.

The biblical text highlights that Esau was 'a cunning hunter' – the Hebrew עָּרָי (yada'), and one who would live by the sword (Genesis 27:40). In other words, Esau was a well-advanced and skillful hunter who knew how to trap his prey. Just as every hunter, the cunning Esau knew how to deceive his victim by pretending to be a peaceful and harmless man. However, Esau's inner desire was always to kill his target, and the Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation maintains the view that people had also been among his prey [27, p. 12]. In the same manner, Martin Luther taught that Esau had been full of pride and idolatry, and therefore as a grown man, he occupied himself in the fields with hunting and waging war [19, p. 380–381]. The Abrahamic "family did not need game for meat, since Isaac had great flocks and herds; neither did they need protection from wild animals, as Esau had to be a "cunning" hunter to find any to slay. He was simply a carnal, profane, licentious playboy" [16, p. 80]. Furthermore, the New Testament writer (traditionally, Paul the Apostle was thought to be the author) of the book of Hebrews fully supports the view that Esau was a godless and sinful individual. The writer warns the young Christian community to "see to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son" (Hebrews 12:15–16).

In light of this conversation, it is noteworthy to reiterate that the book of Genesis spoke only about two hunters and Esau is one of them. The first hunter, Nimrod, the distinctive prototype of Esau, did not care about the Lord God at all and made the whole world rebel against the Creator [35, p. 317]. Thus, the biblical text revealed that Esau was a carnal, profane, and a licentious man who cared much for his game and the wild-freedom, which makes him accountable to no one except himself. On the other hand, Esau was indifferent to the Lord God and he had no desire or capacity for transcendent things. For that reason, Arthur S. Peake summarized the ancient description of Esau this way: "Esau was a man with no depth of nature and no outlook into the eternal. He was not a man of faith who postpones present gratification for future good, but one who lived like an animal 'tame in earth's paddock as her prize' with no spiritual horizon" [7, p. 156]. It should also be noted that Jewish sages argue that Esau [the ancestor of Rome] bear a resemblance of a wild swine [5, p. 1020–1023].

In contrast to Esau, the Scripture describes Jacob as "an upright [perfect] man, remaining in the tents" (Genesis 25:27 JUB). Gerhard Von Rad elaborates that "the adjective (tam) means actually belonging to the solidarity of community life with its moral regulations, a solidarity that the hunter [Esau] does not know because he is much more dependent on himself' [24, p. 266]. Philo also asserts that Jacob was a man with excellent moral character [10, p. 448]. Equally, Saint Augustine of Hippo, states that Jacob was "a guileless man" [3, p. 16.37]. Based on the linguistic analyses of the biblical text the ancient believers claim that the patriarch Jacob, in God's evaluation, was a perfect man whose heart was right with the Lord, and who earnestly sought the will of God in his life. Therefore, the text describes Jacob with the adjective 'perfect' [33].

In the last part of this descriptive sentence, the narrator makes known that Jacob was "remaining in the tents" (Genesis 25:27 JUB). Historically, Hebrew theologians firmly hold the view that the original Hebrew word אַקּל ('ohel), which is an equivalent of English word "tents," means both the household and the sacred tents where Jacob constantly studied the truth about the Lord God and his will. Therefore, B. Barry Levy argues that this view is absolutely accepted philologically, because the Hebrew word אָקֹל ('ohel) is frequently taken as 'school.' The Aramaic version of this word is also associated with 'school' or 'academy' [28, p. 174]. Furthermore, Midrash Rabbah

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highlights that the Patriarch Jacob, as a mature man, was "dwelling in tents [=schools] – the academy of Shem and the academy of Eber" [15, p. 566]. In the same way, *Bereishis* strongly emphasizes, "the intent of the plural is that Jacob studied with every sage he encountered, this being his sole desire; and he was simple – free of any deviousness" [34, p. 1064].

The ancient Christians supported this view of their Jewish brothers. Nicolaus of Lyra, a Catholic Franciscian teacher, fully endorses the rabbinic interpretation of this passage in the line with his church. Thus, Martin Luther in his teaching referring to the writing of Nicolaus of Lyra said: "Lyra tells what the Jews thought about the tents. I am in complete accord with what he has to say, because it is taken from the fathers. They say that tents not only for households but also for the churches are meat" [21, p. 383–384]. John Wesley also supported this view when he stated "Jacob was a plain man – an honest man that dealt fairly. And dwelt in tents... either, as a shepherd... or as a student, he frequented the tents of Melchizedek or Heber, as some understand it, to be taught by them divine things" [32, p. 53]. These resources convincingly show that respected Jewish and Christian theologians of the past agreed that Moses portrays Jacob as a perfect person from God's perspective, whose only desire was to learn the truth about the Creator of the universe and faithfully serve Him [20, p. 387].

Conclusions. In conclusion, from ancient times, theologians believed that the intrinsic value and consciousness of Esau and Jacob determined their way of life. For that reason, all ancient Hebrew and Christian sages and biblical commentators strongly criticized the mindset and behaver of carnal Esau, and always praised the blameless Patriarch Jacob as an example of godliness and righteousness [29, p. 656]. Thus, proceeding from the ancient apostolic view, Saint Aurelius Ambrosius persistently taught his spiritual flock that: "He [*Jacob*] was a great man and truly happy who could lose nothing of his and possess nothing of another's... the man who has nothing to excess is just – this is to observe the proper mean of justice. The wise man [with the right mindset] is never empty but always has the garment of prudence on himself." Then, in conclusion, Saint Ambrosius called on all believers: "Follow the example of [the] holy [Patriarch] Jacob" [1, p. 158–159].

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## СВІДОМІСТЬ ПАТРІАРХА ЯКОВА ТА ЙОГО БРАТА-АНТИПОДА ІСАВА

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Що саме відрізняє людей, які процвітають у житті, від тих, хто постійно бореться і страждає в житті? Звідки беруться здібності та що спричиняє успіхи людей? Досліджуючи ці складні питання, багато сучасних психологів, психіатрів, педагогів, неврологів і дослідників людської поведінки стверджує, що фізичне здоров'я людини, її мораль і внутрішні прагнення надзвичайно сильно впливають на мислення людини і, як наслідок, на її повсякденну поведінку. Вчені вважають, що це відбувається тому, що мислення чи свідомість людини – це система цінностей, яка керує тим, як люди поводяться з кожною конкретною життєвою ситуацією, або як люди розуміють, що відбувається навколо них і що вони повинні робити в цей момент. З цієї причини сучасні вчені, як богослови споконвіку, почали стверджувати, що поведінку кожної людини можна покращити, просвіщаючи її свідомість. Стаття має на меті дослідити, що говорить Священна Біблія про свідомість людини. Чи правда, що свідомість людей визначає їхнє буття, або, навпаки, їхнє буття визначає їхню свідомість? Прикметно, що тисячоліттями Біблія навчала, що поведінка будь-якої людини може бути «змінена оновленням ії розуму» (Римлян12:2). Писання також стверджує, що поведінка людини може поступово змінюватиметься під впливом «оновленого духу [розуму] людини» (Ефесян 4:23). У видатному випадку біблейських Ісава та Якова богослови завжди зазначають, що обоє ці близнюки походили з однієї материнської утроби, мали однакових батьків та абсолютно ідентичне оточення. З іншого боку, вони (Ісав та Яків) надзвичайно відрізняються один від одного. У дослідницькій розвідці зображено, як через історію єврейські та християнські громади розглядали та тлумачили життя плотського Ісава та праведного патріарха Якова. Утім, головна мета дослідження – показати з богословського погляду, як людське бажання, розум і внутрішні прагнення впливають на поведінку людини та зумовлюють результат людського життя.

*Ключові слова:* Книга Буття, свідомість людини, воля, внутрішні прагнення, оновлення розуму, патріарх Яків, значення імені Якова, плотський Ісав, єврейські та християнські богослови.