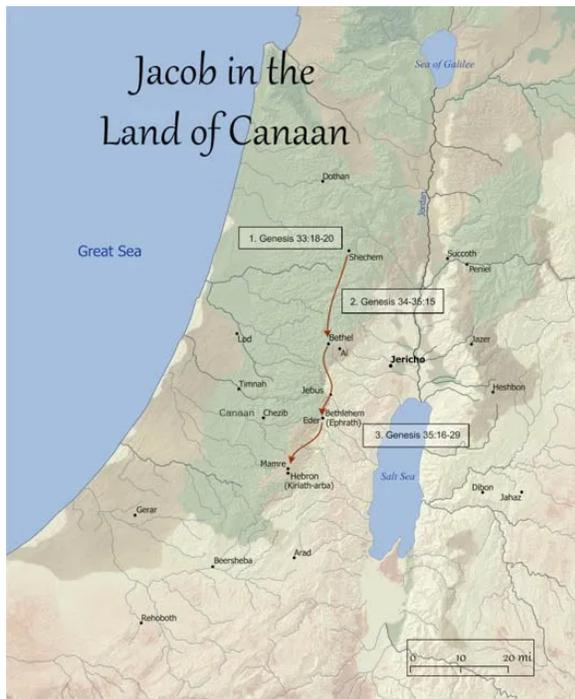


Genesis 36:1-43 Descendants of Esau

When we left Jacob, he was in difficulties. He had fled from the city of Shechem because two of his sons, Simeon and Levi, had murdered the men of the village in retaliation for the rape of their sister, Dinah, by the son of a local ruler. So, God had told Jacob to take his family to Bethel, and as the family traveled slowly across Canaan, God had protected them from the other Canaanite peoples who sought revenge for the vicious attack against the men of Shechem. Eventually Jacob and his family came to Ephrath (Bethlehem), where Rachel gave birth to her second son, Benjamin. But the joy of Benjamin's birth was soon overshadowed, because Rachel died from complications during childbirth. After some time, the family made their way to Hebron where Jacob's father, Isaac, was dying. Isaac soon died, he was "gathered to his people" as the writer eloquently put it, at the age of 180. He was buried by his sons Jacob and Esau.



Throughout our study of the great patriarchs of Israel, we have seen time and again the faithfulness of God to His chosen people. He had made them fruitful and allowed them to have children both beyond their natural years (Abraham and Sarah) and in unnatural numbers (Jacob's twelve sons). He had allowed them to settle safely in the already occupied, but promised, land of Canaan, though the fulfillment of that promise of possession was still centuries in the future. He had blessed them and blessed those who had been friendly to this small clan of Hebrews. He had also caused punishment to befall those who had been unfriendly to the clan, even if unwittingly. His presence and protection had manifested themselves countless times, and He had used these people to bring His sovereign plan of salvation thus far into history.

So, having brought Jacob back from Paddan-aram to Canaan, and having brought Jacob to the head of the patriarchal family due to the death of his father, Isaac, the attention of Scripture now returns to his brother, Esau. Though Esau had been present at the burial of his father, Isaac, he has largely been missing from the biblical narrative since Jacob's return to Canaan and their tense, but ultimately anticlimactic, reunion. Living in the southern part of Palestine, Esau had prospered, even though he was not of the chosen line. He serves as an example of the truth that God keeps all of His promises to all people, and that His sovereign will extends to those whom He has called as well as to those whom He has not.

To briefly recount his history, we can remember that Esau was "a skillful hunter, a man of the field" (Genesis 25:27). He was the eldest son and favorite of his father, Isaac, but Esau could also be rash, unthinking, and even disrespectful at times. In one moment of hunger, he bartered away his birthright for

a quick meal (Genesis 25:29-34). Later, he was tricked out of his father's blessing by his deceitful and manipulative twin brother, Jacob, and realizing his loss he cried out,

³⁸“Do you have only one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father.’ So Esau lifted his voice and wept.

³⁹Then Isaac his father answered and said to him,

“Behold, away from the fertility of the earth shall be your dwelling,
And away from the dew of heaven from above.

⁴⁰By your sword you shall live,

And your brother you shall serve;

But it shall come about when you become restless,

That you will break his yoke from your neck” (Genesis 27:38-40).

Thus, Esau had not been blessed by his father, but rather cursed, and warned of a future that did not look at all promising.

Esau's history reminds us of another son of a patriarch who was outside the chosen line. Ishmael, the son of Abraham by Hagar, was also a first-born son who did not inherit the promises of land, seed, and blessing as he had expected. He, too, serves as an example of God's sovereignty in choosing those who are His won. But that did not mean Ishmael had been ignored by God. God had reassured the plaintive Abraham that “as for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I will bless him, and will make him fruitful and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall become the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation” (Genesis 17:20). This was a promise God had reaffirmed to Ishmael's mother when she thought they both would perish, “arise, lift up the lad, and hold him by the hand, for I will make a great nation of him” (Genesis 21:18). And in His own good time, God had fulfilled this promise (Genesis 25:12-18).

While Scripture does not record a similar explicit promise to Esau, clearly from the passage we are studying, and also from other accounts in Scripture, Esau, too, became the father of a great nation. Esau dwelt in Seir, or Edom (Genesis 32:3), a land that he took from the people already living there, “the Horites formerly lived in Seir, but the sons of Esau dispossessed them and destroyed them from before them and settled in their place” (Deuteronomy 2:12). This brief account shows that Esau proved to be as warlike as his father's prophecy had predicted.

The Edomites flourished in Seir. Hundreds of years later, they remained a potent force with which the descendants of Jacob were compelled to reckon. In fact, God commanded and warned Moses during the Exodus, “⁴you will pass through the territory of your brothers the sons of Esau who live in Seir; and they will be afraid of you. So be very careful; ⁵do not provoke them, for I will not give you any of their land, even as little as a footstep because I have given Mount Seir to Esau as a possession” (Deuteronomy 2:4-5). Thus the Edomites were both powerful and under the protection of God. We must remember that the promises of God applied to more than the chosen line of Hebrews.

As God had told Abraham,

“⁴As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you,

And you will be the father of a multitude of nations.

⁵No longer shall your name be called Abram,

But your name shall be Abraham;

For I have made you the father of a multitude of nations” (Genesis 17:4-5).

Esau’s Immediate Family

The genealogy in chapter 36 is the longest in Genesis, and it traces the lineage of the Edomites in great detail. It is given in the usual straightforward terms. It is the *tōlēdōt* formula which we saw before in previous genealogies, “now these are the records of the generations of Esau (that is, Edom)” (v. 1). That Esau was the father of the Edomite nation is confirmed in Obadiah, a sad but unmistakable prophecy of destruction for the people of Edom. The origin of the name, we can recall, was related to the renouncing of the birthright by Esau for a bowl of lentil stew (Genesis 25:30).

Whereas his brother Jacob had fathered twelve sons through his two wives and their two servants, Scripture relates that Esau managed to produce five sons through three different wives.

“²Esau took his wives from the daughters of Canaan: Adah the daughter of Elon the Hittite, and Oholibamah the daughter of Anah and the granddaughter of Zibeon the Hivite; ³also Basemath, Ishmael’s daughter, the sister of Nebaioth. ⁴Adah bore Eliphaz to Esau, and Basemath bore Reuel, ⁵and Oholibamah bore Jeush and Jalam and Korah. These are the sons of Esau who were born to him in the land of Canaan” (v. 2-5).

We can recall that unlike Jacob, who returned to their family homeland to take a wife from among his relatives, Esau had chosen to take wives from among the local, pagan population of Canaan. And we can also remember that when Esau did so, it became a cause of displeasure to his parents and even provided the motivation to send Jacob to Paddan-aram to find a wife from among his own people (Genesis 27:46).

The Hittites and Hivites were local tribes within Canaan (Genesis 15:20; 34:2), and these peoples provided the first two of Esau’s wives. Interestingly, for his third wife, he chose a distant relation, the daughter of Ishmael, his uncle. Thus we see that the rejected lines intermarried. But one challenge this list in Genesis 36 poses is that it differs from another account earlier in Genesis.

“³⁴When Esau was forty years old he married Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite. . . . ⁸So Esau saw that the daughters of Canaan displeased his father Isaac; ⁹and Esau went to Ishmael, and married, besides the wives that he had, Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham’s son, the sister of Nebaioth” (Genesis 26:34; 28:8-9).

Basemath is the only name that appears in both accounts, but in one account she is the daughter of Ishmael and in the other Mahalath is listed as Ishmael’s daughter. There is no clear way to reconcile the differences, although we might argue either that people went by different names in different cultures or that Esau took several wives and neither list is a complete account.

The firstborn son, if we can assume that the listing is chronological, had six sons, if we include Amelek who was the child of the concubine Timna. The second son, Reuel, had four sons. The other three sons, Jeush and Jalam and Korah, it seems had no progeny, and it appears as if their place in the genealogy (after the grandsons are listed) is intended to discount them, though we do not know why that might be. Thus Esau had five sons and ten grandsons. Of those mentioned, Teman, again the firstborn, may have risen to prominence. There was a prominent town of the same name (Amos 1:12) and it may have been the leading city of the Edomites, since judgments are pronounced against it by Jeremiah (Jeremiah 49:20), Ezekiel (Ezekiel 25:13), and Obadiah (Obadiah 9).

Of special mention is Amalek, the son of Eliphaz through Timna, the concubine. As we have seen with Sarah, Leah, and Rachel, the use of a maidservant was not out of the ordinary in this time period, and it may have been the case here. The nomadic tribe that would bear his name was distinct from the Edomites. Who led a more sedentary lifestyle. The Amalekites made frequent appearances in the Old Testament, usually attempting to thwart the purposes of God, and they were duly punished (Exodus 17:8-16; Numbers 14:39-45; Deuteronomy 25:17-19; 1 Samuel 15:1-9). That Amalek is specifically mentioned as the son of a concubine was no doubt intended to disparage his ancestry. Finally, as a point of interest, the Korah mentioned here is neither related to the sons of Korah so often mentioned in the Psalms, nor is he an ancestor of the Korah mentioned during the exodus (Numbers 16:1).



The Clans of Esau

Now the narrative moves to succeeding generations, and in doing so changes to something of a political history of the Edomites. “¹⁵These are the chiefs of the sons of Esau. The sons of Eliphaz, the firstborn of Esau, are chief Teman, chief Omar, chief Zepho, chief Kenaz, ¹⁶chief Korah, chief Gatam, chief Amalek. These are the chiefs descended from Eliphaz in the land of Edom; these are the sons of Adah. ¹⁷These are the sons of Reuel, Esau’s son: chief Nahath, chief Zerah, chief Shammah, chief Mizzah. These are the chiefs descended from Reuel in the land of Edom; these are the sons of Esau’s wife Basemath. ¹⁸These are the sons of Esau’s wife Oholibamah: chief Jeush, chief Jalam, chief Korah. These are the chiefs descended from Esau’s wife Oholibamah, the daughter of Anah. ¹⁹These are the sons of Esau (that is, Edom), and these are their chiefs” (v. 15-19).

The repetition of the names is not exact, because the purpose of the narrative was to list the leaders of the Edomites, and not necessarily the linear descendants of Esau. Thus the Korah listed must be a grandson of Esau, and a seventh son of Eliphaz. He is obviously not the same person as his uncle, who shared the

same name (v. 18). The term used for ‘chiefs’ is *’elep* and can refer either to a clan, tribe, or the number one thousand. So a more literal wording might be “the chief of a thousand.” We can find similar language in the accounts in 1 Chronicles 1:51-54 and Exodus 15:15.

Kings of Seir

“²⁰These are the sons of Seir the Horite, the inhabitants of the land: Lotan and Shobal and Zibeon and Anah, ²¹and Dishon and Ezer and Dishan. These are the chiefs descended from the Horites, the sons of Seir in the land of Edom. ²²The sons of Lotan were Hori and Hemam; and Lotan’s sister was Timna. ²³These are the sons of Shobal: Alvan and Manahath and Ebal, Shepho and Onam. ²⁴These are the sons of Zibeon: Aiah and Anah - he is the Anah who found the hot springs in the wilderness when he was pasturing the donkeys of his father Zibeon. ²⁵These are the children of Anah: Dishon, and Oholibamah, the daughter of Anah. ²⁶These are the sons of Dishon: Hemdan and Eshban and Ithran and Cheran. ²⁷These are the sons of Ezer: Bilhan and Zaavan and Akan. ²⁸These are the sons of Dishan: Uz and Aran. ²⁹These are the chiefs descended from the Horites: chief Lotan, chief Shobal, chief Zibeon, chief Anah, ³⁰chief Dishon, chief Ezer, chief Dishan. These are the chiefs descended from the Horites, according to their various chiefs in the land of Seir” (v. 20-30).

The narrative now turns its attention to the sons of Seir. Seir was a Horite, one of the peoples of Canaan. They had actually been the original inhabitants of the area to which Esau and his family moved, and had given their name to the land, but eventually they would be dispossessed by the descendants of Esau. “The Horites formerly lived in Seir, but the sons of Esau dispossessed them and destroyed them from before them and settled in their place, just as Israel did to the land of their possession which the Lord gave to them” (Deuteronomy 2:12).

Seir was the ancestor of the Horite peoples and the name of the clan was likely taken from his grandson, Hori. Egyptian records of the time identify the group as mercenaries and robbers, but that may just be prejudice. The seven sons of Seir fathered a total of twenty children among them. The chronology is given in the usual fashion, tracing the lineage through succeeding generations. The only aberration in this is the comment about “Anah who found the hot springs in the wilderness when he was pasturing the donkeys of his father Zibeon” (v. 24). The language is interesting in that the Hebrew word used here can be translated either as “hot springs,” or as “a mirage,” a decidedly different interpretation altogether. So, either Anah saw these springs of water or only thought he did so. It is impossible to know for certain.

That the clan pastured donkeys indicates that they were likely traders who migrated with goods probably from Egypt to Canaan and beyond to the Tigris and Euphrates river valley and perhaps even farther. That the Egyptians considered them as robbers may just reflect the shrewd business dealings of the Horites. Eventually, the Edomites conquered the Horites, and they also intermarried with them after they migrated into the land of Seir. This was not uncommon in the ancient world where political conquest often included social conquest as well. One of Esau’s wives was Oholibamah, the daughter of Anah (v. 18), and Timna, the sister of Lotan the son of Seir, was the concubine of Esau’s son, Eliphaz (v. 12).

Kings of Edom

³¹Now these are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom before any king reigned over the sons of Israel. ³²Bela the son of Beor reigned in Edom, and the name of his city was Dinhabah. ³³Then Bela died, and Jobab the son of Zerah of Bozrah became king in his place. ³⁴Then Jobab died, and Husham of the land of the Temanites became king in his place. ³⁵Then Husham died, and Hadad the son of Bedad, who defeated Midian in the field of Moab, became king in his place; and the name of his city was Avith. ³⁶Then Hadad died, and Samlah of Masrekah became king in his place. ³⁷Then Samlah died, and Shaul of Rehoboth on the Euphrates River became king in his place. ³⁸Then Shaul died, and Baal-hanan the son of Achbor became king in his place. ³⁹Then Baal-hanan the son of Achbor died, and Hadar became king in his place; and the name of his city was Pau; and his wife's name was Mehetabel, the daughter of Matred, daughter of Mezahab" (v. 31-39).

This narrative represents a traditional kings list, a feature of literature common in the ancient world. It is introduced with the statement that "these are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom before any king reigned over the sons of Israel" (v. 31) which may have either of two possible meanings. First, it may imply that these kings reigned in Edom before any Hebrew king reigned in Israel. Or it may mean that these kings reigned in Edom before any Hebrew kings conquered them and reigned over the land of Edom. In either case, it is clear that this note is a post-Mosaic addition to the text, probably inserted during or soon after the reign of King David.

Curiously, this list may indicate an elective kingship rather than a dynastic one. If that is so, then this would be the only recorded list of non-dynastic kings in the Near East with the exception of the selection of King Saul by God through the prophet Samuel. One reason in favor of this argument is that though the eight kings follow one another in what appears to be an orderly and routine succession, none is described as the son of the former. For example, Jobab, the son of Zerah, is the successor to Bela, the preceding king (v. 33). Also, the kings ruled from different cities, something very unlikely in a hereditary dynasty. It is possible that these kings were not nationally recognized, but rather were like the biblical judges. That is, they were men who rose to prominence in different parts of Edom, and ruled events from their respective cities as far as they could extend their influence.

If these eight generations of kings can be traced back from about the time of David, it would place their beginnings in the 13th century BC. Since this was also the approximate time of the biblical judges, that form of rulership may have existed in both cultures. Also, we can see that the promise to Abraham and Sarah that "kings of peoples will come from her" (Genesis 17:16) may be taken to include kings of nations other than Israel.

Clans of Esau

⁴⁰Now these are the names of the chiefs descended from Esau, according to their families and their localities, by their names: chief Timna, chief Alvah, chief Jetheth, ⁴¹chief Oholibamah, chief Elah, chief Pinon, ⁴²chief Kenaz, chief Teman, chief Mibzar, ⁴³chief Magdiel, chief Iram. These are the chiefs of Edom (that is, Esau, the father of the Edomites), according to their habitations in the land of their possession" (v. 40-43).

This section concludes with a second list of the clans descended from Esau. Yet a problem is that this list, while it seems a restatement of that given earlier in verses 15-19, is far from identical. In fact, only two names, Teman and Kenaz, are common to both lists. Two explanations for this might be that one of these lists arranges the clans genealogically, and the other geographically. A second option is that this list represents those chieftains who were in power subsequent to those mentioned in the first list. That two of the names would be the same is not unusual - think of all the Henrys of England or Louis of France.

Takeaways

In a genealogy such as this, first, we can see the detail of God's sovereign plan. His unfolding of history is particular and involves specific people at specific times. Second, we can recognize that though the Edomites were not part of the chosen line, they were blessed by God since they were also descendants of Abraham. God's plan is for all people, and no one is outside of His jurisdiction. That understanding ought to inform and impact our view of evangelism and missions.