

Genesis chapter 36

WEEK 33

While this chapter is primarily a genealogical listing, there's more to be gained from it than you might think. We can learn much about tribal society, and how families mixed, and even the politics of the era. So, while this might seem like a nice time to just kind of mentally turn off, I'd recommend that this may be one of those times to take in a little more caffeine and pay close attention and take a lot of notes. It'll help you considerably down the line.

READ GEN 36 all

This is called the generations of Esau. And, at this point in the OT, we can say that the personal history of the Patriarchs ends, and the history of Israel, the 12 tribes, begins with the chapter after this one. Let's remember that whenever we hear either Jewish or Christian scholars speak of the biblical "patriarchs", or the Bible uses the term patriarchs or fathers, it is speaking ONLY of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

What we can readily see here is that Esau had many children, and that it is clearly spelled out that Esau and Edom are a) one in the same individual, b) that Esau, brother of Jacob, is the founder of all the Edomite tribes, c) he is the namesake of the land of Edom, d) that Mt. Seir is in the land of Edom, and that the terms "Seir" and "Edom" are interchangeable. That is, when we hear the Bible speak of the Land of Seir, or Mt. Seir, or Edom, it's all basically the same place.

And, that place is to the southeastern end of the Dead Sea.

One of the purposes of these long genealogical listing is to show us that the prophetic blessings of Isaac over his twin sons Esau and Jacob had, or were in process, of coming to pass. Let's review this blessing of Genesis chapter 27, verses 38-40.

^{NAS} **Genesis 27:38** *And Esau said to his father, "Do you have only one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father." So Esau lifted his voice and wept.³⁹ Then 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.⁴⁰ "And by your sword you shall live, And your brother you shall serve; But it shall come about when you become restless, That you shall break his yoke from your neck."*

Most of your Bibles will NOT say "away from" the fertility of the earth, but instead they leave out the word "away", making it that Esau WILL live in a fertile place where there is abundant moisture. It has long been known by Jewish and Hebrew scholars that it was Rabbinic *Tradition* that the word AWAY was removed from the text, showing sympathy and understanding for Esau and his having been tricked out of his birthright and blessing. But, in fact, the earliest Hebrew manuscripts plainly show that it was "AWAY" from the fertility and moisture that Esau would live. And, of course, that is exactly where Esau went.....to an area known as the Arabah..... a desert.

It should not go unnoticed that Esau continued with his “profane” ways that God, in His foreknowledge, knew he would so He took away Esau’s birthright and removed him from the line of promise, even before he was born. From here on in the Bible, OT and NT, Esau and Edom are generally associated symbolically with unrighteousness and rebellion, and gets more so as we leave the Torah and move into the later books of the OT. Yet, some deference is paid to Esau because in Deuteronomy 23 Moses orders the Israelites “not to abhor an Edomite” (and Edomite is a descendant of Esau) because they are kinsman of Israel. So, frankly, there is an almost schizophrenic remembrance of Esau in the Bible: at once aligning him with the unrighteous and the wicked, and at the same time reminding Israel that the descendants of Esau are kinsman, and so Israel shouldn’t hate Esau and his descendants. This kind of rationale is quite difficult for the Western mind to understand, because we look at family relationships from the more European “extended” and “nuclear” family viewpoint. But, we must remember that the entire Bible talks about family relationships from the Middle Eastern *tribal* viewpoint. Let me say that again: from Genesis 1 to Revelation 21, the context of family and nation in the Bible is tribal. So, we have to be very careful not to just willy-nilly substitute our modern Western views and social structures into our understanding of OT or NT scriptures.

In the news of the Middle East which dominates our TV screens 24 hours a day, we endure these frustrating realities whereby the Sunni Muslims will blow up Shiite Muslim Mosques, and vice versa, and some Shiites will kill other Shiites, and some Sunnis will kill other Sunnis, and Iran Shiites will war against Iraqi Shiites, so on; and yet, when the US comes to the aid of one, to stop the horror, the other suddenly turns on the US claiming brotherhood between the two warring factions.

In Afghanistan, though the news from there barely makes a blip on the radar screen, currently, we constantly hear of one war lord fighting against another, the US siding with yet another, and then suddenly it all shifts around and the US finds itself fighting against people who only yesterday that fought as allies. That is because these “war lords” are simply tribal leaders, doing what they’ve always done; attempting to gain dominance, which is the primary job of any tribal leader.

I remember in the first war against Saddam Hussein.....the war of the elder President Bush..... hearing the representatives of various Arab nations saying that they did NOT want to go against Saddam because even his invasion of Kuwait was simply bad behavior, something that deserved admonishment but not destruction. They saw him as a brother who had gone was misbehaving, causing trouble for his family, not as a ruthless dictator threatening the stability of the world. And, even though these people will viscously attack and kill one another, it is, in the end, an age old battle for tribal dominance in their minds; it is normal, not something to be stopped and changed. It is an ancient way of life that has existed since time immemorial, and it is a preferred way for perhaps the majority.....but certainly for the leadership.....of these Middle Eastern peoples and nations.

This is why these Middle Eastern nations that absolutely SEEM to hate on another, even committing genocide upon one another, will each contribute to the fighting against the US and Europe; because they see themselves as extensions of the Esau and Ishmael tribes, and therefore, family. This is the mentality we deal with throughout the Bible; Esau is a bad boy, Ishmael is NOT the chosen one; but, they are still, in the larger tribal sense, distant kinsman.....distant family.....of Israel.

But, looking even closer, we find a rather ironic situation develop: all of Esau's sons were born **inside** the promised land, while Jacob's sons were born **outside** the promised land. Esau's sons were born in Canaan, Jacob's born in Mesopotamia. Yet, in revealing his full character, Esau took his family and **removed** them from the blessing of the Promised Land, while Jacob took his family and brought them INTO the blessing of the Promised Land. Wow. What incredible symbolism we have here. What a terrible fate awaits those whose family knows God, but the family leader removes them. And, what an equally wonderful blessing to the family leader who takes his family that has existed outside of God's blessing, but leads them into God's blessing.

To add to this irony, isn't it amazing that in God's great plan, the people of Israel (Jacob) were born into God's promises, and were to be inheritors of all of God's promises, yet they rejected it, in general, and moved away, so to speak. At the same time, gentiles, born OUTSIDE the promises, and born as non-inheritors, were, through Jesus, given the opportunity to move INTO the Promised Land and become co-inheritors with Israel; its Esau and Jacob all over again. And, as I have taught you since Genesis 1, this is but a God-pattern. And, when God establishes a pattern, He sticks with it.

Let's move on. We see many many sons, grandsons, great grandsons of Esau documented here in Genesis 36, and of course, these are mentioned because they would each have created their own named tribe. Some of these names we will see later in the OT, particularly during and after the Exodus from Egypt. But, notice something in verses 38 and 39: there is a fellow, a descendant of Esau, named Baal-hanan. This is just further concrete evidence of the rebellion and idolatry practiced by Esau and his descendants. For, since time immemorial, it has been the practice of tribes of the Middle East to adopt the name of the chief god they worship as part of their family name. Here we see the familiar name "Baal", a Canaanite word for the now deified Nimrod, attached to one of Esau's progeny; this son, and I'm sure several others, were Baal worshippers and proud of it.

But, we learn some other things when we dissect this genealogy chart that are useful. First, though, let me address something that a sharp student of the Biblical texts will catch: the descendants and wives of Esau as listed in Genesis 26, do not precisely match with those given to us here. And, scholars have struggled with this, and with various conclusions.

For instance, the 3 wives listed for Esau in Genesis 26 are Judith, Basemath, and Mahalath. Here in Genesis 36, the wives are listed as Ada, Basemath, and Oholihamah. The only agreement between the two chapters is Basemath, but even then she is assigned

a different father: she is the daughter of Elon the Hittite in Genesis 26, but she is the daughter of Ishmael in Genesis 36.

Obviously we have renderings of family lines from two different viewpoints. More and more as scholars begin to unravel to stop trying to view the Bible from the European Western mindset, and start viewing it for what it is.....a Middle Eastern, tribal, Semitic, Hebrew document....some of these issues start to clear up.

For example, when we look at the NT genealogy of our Savior in different Gospels, we'll get slightly different family tree listings. But, as it is now known and understood, that is because it was the Middle Eastern, and Hebrew, way to lay out a family tree based on pure genealogy and firstborns when blood lines is what matters, and a slightly different family tree list emphasizing leaders and kings of the tribe when what matters is ruler-ship and tribal authority. These are NOT in conflict with one another.....its really just a matter of the *purpose* of the family tree list.

Very likely, one of two things is happening with these two different lists of wives of Esau: either some of the wives went by two different names, depending on where they were living at the time (a common thing in that era), OR, these were ALL wives of Esau, its just that the first list was for one purpose, and the 2nd was for a different purpose.

Another influence that often causes a divergence in genealogical listings is when two prominent family groups begin to intermarry, and so, over time, the lines blur. In our age where divorce is more common than not, it is usual that brothers and sisters living together will have different last names, and that because in our society a woman changes her last name to match that of her CURRENT husband, the mother's last name will be different than the name of her own child! But, whether the mother's last name matches that of her child is based on WHEN her name was written down and for what purpose. If she was still married to the father of her children when her name was written down, then she and her children's last names will match. Later, if the woman divorces and remarries, and then her name is written down, her last name will probably NOT match with that of her children. And, then of course is the case where a biological father will consent to allowing the new stepfather to adopt, so the child's last name is changed.....and on and on.

So, while we understand all that is true for our society, and so don't think about the way the same person's name might appear on different documents as "error" or "conflict", in the Bible era societies did similar things regarding name changes, but for different reasons. So, in the Bible we often get this jumble of overlapping names and name changes due to births, deaths, a widow marrying a husband of a different nationality, the family relocating to another nation and adopting the local customs for naming people, the family dropping allegiance to one god and beginning allegiance to a new god, and on and on.

What we need to notice from all this, is that there is much intermingling by means of marriage going on between the descendants of Ishmael (Abraham's son), and Esau

(Isaac's son, Jacob's twin brother). It began very early on, and accelerated rapidly. It happened more so with some of the clans of each tribe, and less so with others. The result is that by the time we reach the NT times, the intermingling is great, and it is hard to draw a distinction between a person who would call Esau his ancestor and one who would call Ishmael his ancestor. In Jesus' day, as it is now, a true Arab.....that is, an Arabian, not simply a person who speaks one of the many Arabic dialects.... is generally a descendant of Ishmael, and most of the other Middle Eastern tribes are a mixture of Esau and Ishmael; the main exception being those of the northern Middle Eastern areas which have more Persian blood in them.

The final thing we need to note before we move on is that we see the name of "Amalek" appear. Amalek appears as a very early enemy of Israel, and in fact much is said in Exodus about the tribe of Amalek attacking Israel on their journey through the wilderness after leaving Egypt. Amalek was the product of Timna (his mother), who was a Horite. In fact, Timna was NOT a legal wife, but a concubine. So, she had an inferior status, which in turn gave Amalek an inferior status in the tribal way of thinking.

That Timna was a Horite (a Canaanite tribe), and was joined to the Edomite tribe by means of marriage to Eliphaz (an Edomite), made Amalek an Edomite tribe; but, inferior to some of the other descendants who married more closely within the family. Therefore, Amalek, though technically descendants of Esau, is really treated somewhat separately by the Holy Scriptures. Amalek IS NOT considered kinsmen of Israel, while other descendants of Esau ARE considered kinsmen of Israel. This reflects far more politics and traditions than it does actual genealogy.....and we're going to find an awful lot of this sort of thing throughout OT and NT Scripture. It's up to us to discover and understand.....for the Hebrew writers and the early readers of the Torah and the Hebrew Bible well understood these nuances that have been lost to us.

So, please.....don't close your mind off and take a little snooze when we discuss these historical/sociological/genealogical matters; next ONLY to the Holy Spirit dwelling within you, THESE are the keys to actually grasping what the writings of the Bible mean, and how they are to be applied to your life.

GENESIS CHAPTER 37

At this point in the Torah, all remaining chapters of Genesis will revolve around Joseph. The era of the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is coming to a close. But, more will be said about Joseph and acts that focus on his life than any of the Patriarchs.

One could also say that it is at this point in the Torah, that ISRAEL becomes the center-point for the first time. Israel is now painted as a separate people, but as of chapter 37 certainly not yet attaining nation status.

So, as much as Joseph is front and center in the 13 remaining chapters of Genesis, why is Joseph not considered a Patriarch as was his father? I can't really say for sure why that status ends with Jacob and not Joseph, but I can point to one outstanding fact that certainly is a marked change in the way Yehoveh operates with the leader of the Hebrews: God had direct and 2-way communication with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.....He delivered His instructions to the Patriarchs by means of direct Divine Oracle.....but He did NOT with Joseph. Direct, 2-way communication was reserved for very special cases, and Joseph was not one of them.

Over the next several chapters, woven into all this narrative, we are going to get a look at another of God's Governing Dynamics. The first Governing Dynamic we recognized was that of division, separation and election; and this would be God's device to achieve His goal of perfecting humanity and bringing mankind into unity with Himself. A word that we hear often in the Church is "sanctification". Sanctification is the act of God's dividing, separating, and electing people for His purposes. Sanctification is the setting apart of human beings for Himself. A set apart for God person has been granted a holy status; a status that is above common. Common is the status of the world; holy is the status of those set apart for God. Israel was set apart for God, so they were, are, holy. As a Believer, you have been sanctified; that is, you have been divided, separated, and elected to become God's own children, to conform to His will, to serve Him. You have been declared holy. But, in reality, Believers are more like the set-apart tribe, of the set-apart nation of Israel; and that set-apart tribe was Levi. For we are told in the NT that Believers of Yeshua are His priesthood.

This other Governing Dynamic of God is the one that we see the Lord employ when dealing with Joseph; and that second Governing Dynamic that I'd like to teach you about is Divine Providence. That is, God works His will largely unseen and unknown to us...yet, in our ignorance, we are actually party to it. Somehow in the free exercise of our wills, God guides mankind to the end He had decided back in eternity past; yet often it seems as though He isn't guiding at all.....it even seems, at times, that He has created His Creation, and left us on our own, allowing His Creation to take whatever route destiny has it.

Further, many times it feels that God could not possibly achieve His goals using the present circumstances. Yet, without our knowing it, Divine Providence is at work, moving towards its inevitable, unchangeable, God ordained, conclusion. And, while we can see this in action within the lives of the Patriarchs, albeit dimly at times, the story of Joseph is positively ablaze with observable Divine Providence. Of course, for us it is observable because we have something that Joseph and all the other characters associated with this amazing journey that is Joseph's life DIDN'T have: we have the benefit of hindsight. For while they were in the midst of it all, they couldn't see it.....Divine Providence.....at work. And, that is because one of the prime characteristics of Divine Providence is that it is rarely observable by humans as it unfolds. So now, we have been introduced to two of God's Governing Dynamics: Sanctification, the process of dividing, separating, and electing; and Divine Providence, the unseen working out of God's will in

all humanity. With Sanctification and Divine Providence in mind, let's look now at the life of Joseph.

READ GEN 37 all

With the outset of Chapter 37, Joseph, 2nd to the last of Jacob's sons, is 17 years old. He is living in Canaan, along with the rest of his brothers. Soon, he is going to wind up in Egypt. Here might be a good time to mention something that a good calculator and a little research bring to light. Recall that at the end of chapter 35 is recorded the death of Jacob's father, Isaac. And, I told you then that Isaac had actually lived long enough to meet all of his grandchildren, the 12 tribes of Israel. Well, Isaac also remained alive long enough to know of Joseph's disappearance, but didn't live long enough to learn the outcome.

As is not unusual in the Scriptures (which is not designed, by the way to be a novel), sometimes a statement will just kind of be laid out there, and we'll assume that that statement necessarily is attached to the verses just before it. In fact, that's often not the case.

In Genesis 35:27 we read of Jacob returning to Hebron and greeting Isaac. And, in the next verse we read that Isaac died at the age of 180, and that his sons Esau and Jacob attended to his funeral. Well, as it turns out, verses 27 and 28 are not connected; they are simply two different statements of fact, one following the other. . . . Jacob came home, and sometime later, Isaac died. With a little basic math, we find out that Isaac died after Joseph had gone missing for 12 years. I'm not going to go through the calculations, but if you're interested, here are the two key ingredients: Jacob was 60 years younger than Isaac. So, when Isaac died at 180, Jacob had to have been 120 years old. The second thing to know is that Jacob died at 147 years old. I'll let you figure out how arrive at the proper time line, because all the info necessary is in the next several pages.

The first verse tells us something important: the destiny that Isaac had given to his twin sons in the Blessing, was unfolding. Jacob now lived in the Promised Land, and Esau has left it, living AWAY from fertile ground, and away from regular rainfall. But, another part of a prophetic blessing from a time earlier than Jacob, even earlier than his father Isaac, is near to coming to pass; the Abrahamic blessing that, for a time the Hebrews would live as strangers in a foreign land, and be oppressed. ^{NAS} **Genesis 15:13** *And God said to Abram, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. ¹⁴ "But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve; and afterward they will come out with many possessions.*

Soon, we'll find out that the "land that is not theirs", the place they will live in for 400 years, is Egypt. And, in Chapter 37, we're but a few years away until that event becomes a bitter reality.

Let's end here for this week.