

The Legacy of Esau

- Genesis 36:1, 6-8, 37:1
- This is a difficult passage to read, and much easier to just summarize. That's why we dispensed with reading the 170 names of people, many repeated a few times, not to mention the names of ancient places. We have come to the end of Esau's story, though he will be mentioned several more times in the Bible. But Moses starts this chapter with this familiar phrase: "These are the generations of." Toledot. "This is what follows," in this case, Esau. And what a contrast Esau's legacy is to the legacy that comes from Jacob, who was by no means a perfect man, as we have seen. From Jacob comes the Christ, the Son of God, the Savior of the World. From Esau comes one who will do everything in his power to destroy the Son of God. Let's look at this passage today under two main points: Worldly prosperity and Redemptive history.
- **Worldly Prosperity (verses 6-8)**
- Esau had three Canaanite wives, according to this section, and the list does not correspond with the names of his wives named earlier in Genesis. No explanation given by Moses. From these three wives, Esau had five sons, who are named here, and the narrator makes sure we know they were born in Canaan. But what seems to be most important in this text is the separation Esau puts between himself and his brother. In verse 6 we are told he moves everything he has, wives, children, livestock and property, and "went into a land away from his brother Jacob." Where are you going, Esau? *Away from here!* The reason given in the text reminds us of when Lot left Abram in chapter 13 and moved east. Because the land could not support the two of them and all they owned. Maybe so. But I think it may be more likely a fulfillment of what God said to Esau through his father Isaac years earlier: "By your sword you shall live, and you shall serve your brother; but when you grow restless you shall break his yoke from your neck." (Gen. 27:40)
- Verse 8, "So Esau settled in the hill country of Seir." (**map**) Another way of saying it is, "Hairy settled in shaggy," which reflects the meaning of those two Hebrew words, Esau and Seir.
- Moses writes also in verse 8, "Esau is Edom." And in verse 9, "These are the generations of Esau the father of the Edomites." Moses will repeat this important point several times in the chapter, that Esau is Edom and the land of Edom is Esau's. The separation was not just geographical but spiritual and relational. Edom worshiped other gods and would become a bitter enemy to the people of the one true God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The next section, verses 15-29 tells us the sons of Esau were also chiefs or heads of tribes. Then, verses 31-39 name 8 kings who ruled in Edom. We are not told if they were related to Esau, but remember, Esau is Edom, and kings reigned there, verse 31, "before any king reigned over the Israelites." Yes, it would be hundreds of years, after slavery in Egypt and after rule by judges before Israel would clamor for a king.
- Esau became powerful and wealthy in every sense of that word in worldly terms. Allen Ross writes, "A picture of Esau as a powerful overlord is emerging. Not only did his own sons become chiefs of clans, but the clans in the land were subjugated to him. Esau is Edom." The land of Edom, wicked as it was, became rich and powerful, but as Isaac had prophesied, it came through the sword. And the descendants of Esau, the Edomites, as Vic told us a few weeks ago, would become lifelong and abiding enemies of Israel. When Israel wandered in the wilderness after the exodus, Moses sent word to the king of Edom, asking permission to pass through their territory without taking anything from it, even water from a well. The king of Edom sent back this message, in the spirit of Isaac's prophecy about Esau, "You shall not pass through, lest I come out with the sword against you." Flash forward 400 years to the time when Israel had its very first king. "When Saul had taken the kingship over Israel, he fought against all his enemies on every side, against Moab, against the Ammonites, against Edom, against the kings of Zobah, and against the Philistines. Wherever he turned he routed them." (1

Samuel 14:47) And the second king had to fight them. “And David made a name for himself when he returned from striking down 18,000 Edomites in the Valley of Salt. Then he put garrisons in Edom; throughout all Edom he put garrisons, and all the Edomites became David’s servants.” (2 Samuel 8:13-14) Is Edom done? Not yet! Flash forward another 490 years or so to the time of the Babylonian exile. The prophet Obadiah is known for his vision that concerns God’s plan for restoration of Zion but doom for Edom. This was written before the Babylonian attack as a warning to Edom. Why was God ready to destroy Edom completely? Because during the time of the Babylonian invasion and while the “foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem, you were like one of them.” (Obadiah 11) How were the Edomites like the Babylonians? While the people of Judah were being attacked and dragged into exile, Obadiah prophesied, the Edomites would stand and gloat and do nothing to help. Instead, they would loot the city, and even stand in the way of those trying to escape and capture them, and turn them over to the enemy. Obadiah wrote as a warning, “Do not stand at the crossroads and cut off his (Judah’s) fugitives; do not hand over his survivors in the day of distress.” (Obadiah 14) It would be like a gang broke into your home and was busy capturing your whole family and carrying you all away and your neighbors saw one of your children wriggle free and try to escape. And that neighbor grabs your child and hands him over to the gang, saying, “Here, this one almost got away.” That’s how Edom responded to Judah.

- Jeremiah wrote the book of Lamentations after the exile took place, after Edom stood by and did nothing except help the enemies of God. This verse sums up part of God’s planned redemptive history: “The punishment of your iniquity, O daughter of Zion, is accomplished; he will keep you in exile no longer; but your iniquity, O daughter of Edom, he will punish; he will uncover your sins.” Is Edom done? No!
- Malachi also has something to say about Esau and Edom, when he proclaims this oracle from the Lord: “I have loved you,” says the LORD. But you say, “How have you loved us?” “Is not Esau Jacob's brother?” declares the LORD. “Yet I have loved Jacob but Esau I have hated. I have laid waste his hill country and left his heritage to jackals of the desert.” If Edom says, “We are shattered but we will rebuild the ruins,” the LORD of hosts says, “They may build, but I will tear down, and they will be called ‘the wicked country,’ and ‘the people with whom the Lord is angry forever.’” Your own eyes shall see this, and you shall say, “Great is the LORD beyond the border of Israel!” (Malachi 1:2-5) All who oppose God will be destroyed.
- That text reminded me of a story I heard last week on the World podcast. A man named Mauricio was sitting in the driver’s seat of his parked car in Malibu, California when he received a phone call. He left the car to take the call – and then heard the sounds of massive rocks tumbling down the hillside. “I just heard loud crashes,” said Henao, “And I ran out and saw my car just crushed.”

Picture

- Edom didn’t get a phone call, but they were warned over and over again until it was too late.
- The Edomites were forced from their homeland somewhere around 550 BC and settled in what was later called Idumea. But the descendants of Esau are not done yet. They have another part to play in...
- **Redemptive history (Genesis 37:1)**
- “Jacob lived in the land of his father’s sojourning, in the land of Canaan.” Esau and his worldly kingdom grew powerful and expanded, while Jacob’s little family had no kings, no tribes yet, no land that they controlled. His people were shepherds and lived quietly in the land where for now, they were free of interference. Franz Delitzsch wrote of the contrast between these two brothers, “secular greatness in general grows up far more rapidly than spiritual greatness.” Ross adds, “The promised spiritual blessing demands patience in faith, and emphasizes that waiting while others prosper is a test of faithfulness and perseverance.” How do we grow? By grace through faith!
- As we will see as we continue to work our way through Genesis, the people of God will suffer a great deal before the Promised Land is fully realized. What happens with the people of Esau? They are not Edomites any more but Idumeans, living in and around Hebron. Around 72 B.C. Antipater I of Idumea,

an Edomite whose ancestors converted to Judaism, had a son named Herod. Antipater, in 47 B.C., due to his support of the Roman Empire, was made the first procurator of Judea, Samaria and Galilee by Julius Caesar. Around this time his son Herod is also made the provincial governor of Galilee. In 40 B.C., just three years after his father's death by poisoning, Herod is given the title of King of Judea (King of the Jews) by the Roman Senate. Yes, this is the same King Herod who was asked by wise men where the king of the Jews had been born. The same King Herod who gave the order for the massacre of every male child two and under in Bethlehem. As I said earlier, from Jacob comes the Christ, the Son of God, the Savior of the World. From Esau comes one who will do everything in his power to destroy the Son of God. Father, Son, Grandson are part of redemptive history.

- Building a godly legacy is ultimately up to the Lord. As Paul said, "By the grace of God, I what I am." But we each play a part in that as well. That's why Paul also said in that verse, "and his grace toward me was not in vain." (1 Cor. 15:10)
- What can we take away from this text today? 1- The promises of God are true. We know this but need reminders. 2- The promises of God will be fulfilled. We must only be patient and believe. 3- The wicked seem to prosper while the godly suffer. "I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked...until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end." (Ps. 73)
- Prayer
- Greet one another