



Two Nations: Israel and Edom Genesis 35-36

Introduction

Jacob had anticipated his meeting with Esau with foreboding, but it had turned out to be an incredible reunion. God had softened Esau's heart, resulting in sweet reconciliation and tears. In Jacob's eyes, God had surely worked a miracle, as evidenced in his statement to Esau, "*I have seen your face as though I had seen the face of God*" (Genesis 33:10). With great relief Jacob had continued his journey, first to Succoth and then to Shechem. But as Jacob settled in the land, he discovered that the Canaanites were a danger and a threat to his family. After the rape of his daughter and the angry revenge taken by his sons, Jacob was ready to seek refuge in God and recommit his life.

OUTLINE

- I. Recommitment to God - Genesis 35:1-15**
- II. Death of Loved Ones - Genesis 35:16-29**
- III. Genealogy of Esau - Genesis 36:1-43**

I. Recommitment to God - Genesis 35:1-15

In Genesis 28, as Jacob fled from Esau and journeyed to Padan Aram to seek a wife in his mother's homeland, the Lord had appeared to him in a dream. He promised to give Jacob the land upon which he stood, to give him numerous descendants "*as the dust of the earth*", and to bless all the families of the earth through him. Furthermore, God promised to be with Jacob, protect him and bring him safely back to the land. When Jacob awoke from the dream, he set up a stone pillar and made a vow to God. He promised that if God would bring him safely back to that place, God would surely be his God and he would tithe a tenth of all God gave him. Now God called upon Jacob to fulfill that vow.

A. Jacob's Fresh Encounter with God - Genesis 35:1-7

The place where Jacob had made the vow to God was Bethel. Now God instructed Jacob to go back to Bethel, build an altar there and dwell there. This imperative was a test of Jacob's obedience. Jacob had experienced many deep fears in his life – fear of God, fear of Laban and fear of Esau. He had been through many distressful relationships within his family. He now repented, saying to his household, "*Put away the foreign gods that are among you, purify yourselves, and change your garments. Then let us arise and go up to Bethel.*" Jacob

called for a general repentance and reconsecration of everyone in his household.

The response was unanimous. Jacob took spiritual leadership of his family as they obeyed and gave him all their foreign gods and the rings from their ears. The earrings were not merely ornamental, but were associated with idols and pagan superstition. Jacob hid and left all these things.

As a result of the cleansing, which displayed a recommitment to God, the "*terror of God*" fell upon all the cities they passed as they journeyed to Bethel. God's protection on this journey was essential because of Jacob's reputation after the slaughter at Shechem. He was now "*obnoxious among the inhabitants of the land*", and he feared that they would band together to kill him and all his household (Genesis 34:30). With what thankfulness and joy Jacob must have built the altar at "El Bethel" thereby confirming his allegiance to God!

Application

God allows no foreign gods and He detests all that would distract His people from Him alone. What "gods" in your life have come between you and your Lord? What distractions are keeping you from drawing near to Him and putting Him first in your life? What attitudes, actions and possessions do you need to remove from your life so you may be cleansed to recommit your life to God?

B. Deborah's Death - Genesis 35:8

Deborah, the nurse of Jacob's mother, Rebekah, would have been very old by this time. She had been sent to accompany Rebekah when she left her home with Abraham's servant to become Isaac's bride. (Genesis 24:59) Her death seems to mark the imminent end of a generation and the end of Mesopotamian influence in Jacob's family.

C. God's Reaffirmations - Genesis 35:9-15

God appeared to Jacob at Bethel to confirm His earlier promises of Genesis 28. His reference to Himself as "*God Almighty*" is linked to His sovereign capability of fulfilling all His promises. God blessed Jacob, reminded him that his new name was Israel, and confirmed the covenant which He had made with Abraham and

Isaac. He reminded Jacob that the land of Canaan was given to him and his descendants and that he was to *“Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall proceed from you, and kings shall come from your body”*.

II. Deaths of Loved Ones - Genesis 35:16-29

While journeying on to Ephrath, the ancient name for Bethlehem, Rachel went into labor.

A. Rachel's Delivery - Genesis 35:16-20

Rachel experienced great difficulty in labor and died giving birth. In His mercy, God let her know, through the midwife, that the child was a son. In her last words she was so anguished in her soul that she named him Ben-Oni meaning “son of my sorrows”. Jacob immediately renamed him Benjamin, meaning “son of my right hand”.

Benjamin was the twelfth of Jacob's sons and completed the family which was to become the twelve tribes of Israel. The birth of Benjamin was a fulfillment of Rachel's words at the birth of her firstborn, *“The Lord shall add to me another son”* (Genesis 30:24).

Rachel was buried there on the way to Bethlehem and Jacob set up a pillar over her grave.

B. Reuben's Incestuous Act - Genesis 35:21-22

Jacob's oldest son, Reuben, *“went and lay with Bilhah, his father's concubine”*. Bilhah had been Rachel's maid. She had been given to Jacob as a concubine for the purpose of bearing children and became the mother of Jacob's two sons, Dan and Naphtali (Genesis 30:3-8).

Reuben's act was a grave insult to the memory of Rachel and an abominable act of incest. It is hard to say whether the act was done purely out of lust, in rebellion against his father's headship, to exact revenge for the humiliating treatment of his mother, Leah, or to assert his leadership over his own generation. Whatever the reason, it was a blatant challenge to Jacob's authority and showed Reuben's lack of respect for God. It also draws attention again to his unruly family environment. The consequences of Reuben's actions resulted in loss of his birthright.

C. Israel's Twelve Sons - Genesis 35:23-26

The twelve sons of Jacob are listed to indicate the continuation of the patriarchal heritage. Jacob will give his last words concerning each of his sons as he lies on his death bed (Genesis 49).

Jacob's life had been one of many struggles since he first left Beersheba. He left with only a staff in his hand. Now he returned with a large family and many flocks and herds. With all his deception and human frailties, God had been growing and maturing him for full leadership after Isaac's death.

D. Isaac is “gathered to his people” - Genesis 35:27-29

Isaac lived to be 180 years old. His death marked the end of a generation and it brought Esau and Jacob together to bury their father. Jacob had come back to his father's house in peace just as he had asked (Genesis 28:20-21).

III. Genealogy of Esau - Genesis 36:1-36

Although Esau and his descendants were not included in God's chosen people, God was faithful to grant Isaac's blessing upon him *“Behold, your dwelling shall be of the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above”* (Genesis 27:39).

A. "Esau, who is Edom" - Genesis 36:1

Esau, his descendants and the land where he lived all came to be known as “Edom”, a word which is derived from the Hebrew word for “red”. This name seems quite appropriate for Genesis 25:25 and 30 note that when Esau was born, he came out red and the stew which he traded for his birthright was red. In addition, the land of Edom was noted for its red sandstone formations and red soil.

Chapter 36 gives the genealogies of Esau and of Seir the Horite, the aboriginal inhabitant of Edom, Also listed are the kings of Edom and the chiefs of Esau.

B. Esau's family - Genesis 36:2-19

Esau had three wives, all of which were Canaanite women: Adah, Aholibamah and Basemeth. The first two names differ from those listed in Genesis 26:34 and 28:9. Perhaps the former wives had died, or possibly they used alternate names. Adah was the daughter of Elon the Hittite, Aholibamah was descended from the family of Seir the Horite, and Basemeth was a daughter of Ishmael (Genesis 28:9).

Verses 4 and 5 list the five sons who were born to Esau in the land of Canaan. Because the land could not support the large families and possessions of both Esau and Jacob, Esau migrated to Mt. Seir, providentially leaving Jacob to possess the land promised to him by God. Apparently Esau had lived in the area of Mt. Seir previously (Genesis 33:16), but now his move was a permanent one.

Esau's descendants multiplied rapidly and Edomite tribes became dominant in the region. The genealogy in verses 9-14 focuses on Esau's ten grandsons. Verses 15 through 19 show the emerging tribal structure of the family.

C. The Original Inhabitants of Seir -
Genesis 26:20-30

These verses give the genealogy of the family of Seir the Horite, the indigenous inhabitants of the land. They were eventually conquered by Esau's sons (Deuteronomy 2:22).

D. The Kings of Edom - Genesis 36:31-39

Over the course of time, Edom transitioned from a tribal structure to a kingship. These verses list the names of the kings who reigned in Edom prior to the reigning of any Israelite king. Eight kings are mentioned along with their tribal connection.

E. The Chiefs of Esau - Genesis 36:40-43

These last verses list the names of the chiefs descended from Esau according to their families, their places and their names. Esau's descendants grew into many clans and their sons became chiefs and kings. Edom and its conglomeration of smaller clans became the most powerful force in the region. God was faithful to His promises and blessed Esau even though Esau and his family were not a part of God's chosen people. The closing statement of the chapter, "*Esau was father of the Edomites*", is a reminder of God's words to Rebekah at the birth of her twin sons, "*two nations are in your womb*" (Genesis 25:23). Two nations had been born from the womb of Rebekah: Israel and Edom.

Application

In these chapters, we have seen God's unconditional choice and grace in action. God chose Jacob to carry on the covenant line and protected him and blessed him, not because of anything Jacob had done, good or bad, but simply by sovereign choice and grace. As the apostle Paul writes in Romans 9:11, "*not of works but of Him who calls*". Furthermore, God blessed Esau even though he was not in the chosen line. The blessing was not because of anything Esau had done, but was simply given by the grace of God.

In what ways have you seen God's grace in action in your life? What undeserved blessings do you need to thank God for today?