

Genesis 36 - The Family of Esau

A. Esau's separation from Jacob.

1. (1-5) The wives, sons, and daughters of Esau.
2. (6-8) The separation of Jacob and Esau.
 - a. **Their possessions were too great for them to dwell together:** Esau's cry to Isaac *Have you only one blessing, my father?* (Genesis 27:38) proved unfounded. Because he was a descendant of Abraham God blessed Esau, and blessed him in the only way he really cared about: materially.

B. The descendants of Esau.

1. (9) The Edomites descend from Esau.
 - a. **Esau the father of the Edomites:** Edom and the Edomites are mentioned some 130 times in the Bible. They were an important group of "neighbors" to Israel.
 - When the Israelites came through the wilderness to the Promised Land in the time of Moses, the Edomites refused them passage through their land (Numbers 20:21). This was a source of great discouragement for the nation (Numbers 21:4).
 - Even so, God commanded special regard for the Edomites among Israel: *You shall not abhor an Edomite, for he is your brother* (Deuteronomy 23:7).
 - In the days of Saul, Edom was made subject to Israel (1 Samuel 14:47), and David established garrisons there (2 Samuel 8:14). But later, in the days of Joram, the son of Ahab, the Edomites became independent of Israel (2 Kings 8:16-22).
 - Several of the prophets spoke about and against Edom, including Jeremiah (Jeremiah 49:17-18) and Ezekiel (Ezekiel 25:12-14).
 - Herod the Great - the one who tried to kill the young child Jesus - was an Edomite. From the time Islam conquered the Middle East, the region has been virtually unoccupied, except for a few Bedouins and military outposts. It has been brought to nothing, as Obadiah had prophesied (the entire book of Obadiah records an extended prophecy against Edom).
 - b. **The Edomites in Mount Seir:** The Edomites also held the rock city of Petra, which can only be reached through narrow, winding gorge. Petra was so defensible that it was said that a dozen men could protect Petra against a whole army.
2. (10-43) The descendants of Edom and the chiefs of the Edomites.
 - a. **These were the chiefs of the sons of Esau:** When we see the kings and chiefs among the descendants of Esau, we see more clearly what God meant when He said, *Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated* (Malachi 1:2-3 and Romans 9:13). Esau was obviously a blessed man but he was hated and rejected in regard to being chosen for a critical role in God's plan of redemption.
 - i. "If God blesses so abundantly those who are not chosen, what is the magnitude of His blessings for those who *are* chosen? If non-spiritual people experience such outpourings of merely common grace, how great must the special grace of the regenerate be!" (Boice)

b. **She bore Amalek to Eliphaz:** Notable among this list is **Amalek**. From him came the Amalekites, notable enemies of Israel (Exodus 17:8-16; Deuteronomy 25:17-19; 1 Samuel 15:1-8).

i. In addition, the names of the descendants of Esau don't reflect a godly heart.

- **Alvan** (Genesis 36:23) means "wicked"
- **Aran** (Genesis 36:28) means "mountain goat"
- **Baal-Hanan** (Genesis 36:38) - his name embraces the false god Baal.

c. **Jobab the son of Zerah:** "Many have supposed that *Jobab* is the same as *Job*, so remarkable for his afflictions and patience; and that *Eliphaz* . . . was the same who in the book of Job is called one of his friends: but there is no proper proof of this, and there are many reasons against it." (Clarke)

Genesis 37 - Joseph Is Sold Into Slavery

A. Joseph's dreams.

1. (1-4) Jacob favors Joseph.

a. **Joseph, being seventeen years old:** Thus begins one of the remarkable life stories of the Bible and all literature. "He was loved and hated, favored and abused, tempted and trusted, exalted and abased. Adversity did not harden his character. Prosperity did not ruin him. He seemed to be the same in private as in public. He was a truly great man.

i. Enoch shows the *walk* of faith, Noah shows the *perseverance* of faith, Abraham shows the *obedience* of faith, Isaac shows the *power* of faith, and Jacob shows the *discipline* of faith. Along these lines we could say that Joseph shows the *triumph* of faith. Joseph was not a complainer or compromiser.

b. **Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children:** These chapters stand out for the insight they give us into an obviously troubled family. From the beginning, we get the impression Joseph is sort of a pampered favorite of Jacob, who doesn't mind tattling on his older brothers at all.

c. **Also he made him a tunic of many colors:** Jacob's favoritism of Joseph was plain to all, including Joseph and his brothers. As an outward display of this, he gave Joseph a **tunic of many colors**. This signified a position of favor, princely standing, and birthright. It was a dramatic way of saying he was the son to receive the birthright.

i. The real idea behind the ancient Hebrew phrase for "**tunic of many colors**" is that it was a tunic extending all the way down to the wrists and ankles, as opposed to a shorter one. This was not what a working man wore. It was a garment of privilege and status.

d. **They hated him and could not speak peaceably to him:** Jacob's favoritism of Joseph was an obvious source of conflict in the family. The brothers naturally **hated him** because the father favored him.

2. (5-8) Joseph's first dream.

a. **Joseph had a dream, and he told it to his brothers; and they hated him even more:** At best, Joseph showed a great lack of tact. Surely he knew how much his brothers hated to hear this dream, which set him above his brothers.

- b. **Shall you indeed reign over us?** The brothers understand perfectly the meaning of the dream: one day Joseph would **reign over** them and **have dominion over** them.
 - i. Also relevant to this dream is the fact that it involves **sheaves** of wheat. Joseph's ultimate position of status over his brethren will have much to do with food.

3. (9-11) Joseph's second dream.

- a. **Then he dreamed still another dream and told it to his brothers:** If Joseph was unwise in telling the first dream (knowing how irritating it was to his brothers) he was even more wrong sharing this second dream, especially because it set him not only above his brothers, but also set him above his father and mother.
 - i. Joseph seems to be afflicted with the sort of pride often apparent among the favored and blessed. He is so focused on how great his dreams are for *him*, he doesn't begin to consider how the dreams will sound in the ears of *others*.
 - ii. At this point, Joseph is a *contrast* to Jesus. Jesus wants us to be as He was on this earth: an "others-centered" person. Joseph seems to fall short in this area.
 - iii. Though Joseph was wrong to tell these dreams, they certainly did come true. One may receive a wonderful message from God that He does not intend them to publish to others. Joseph showed a proud lack of wisdom here.

- b. **Shall your mother and I and your brothers indeed come to bow down to the earth before you?** This portion of Genesis possibly isn't in strict chronological order. Back in Genesis 35:16-20, Joseph's mother Rachel died. This portion of Genesis seems to backtrack somewhat.
 - i. Probably, the transition point is in Genesis 37:2: **This is the genealogy of Jacob**. This likely ends the record preserved by Jacob himself (who recounted the death of Rachel), and the next line begins the record preserved by Joseph himself. These same kinds of transitions are found in Genesis 5:1, 6:9, and 25:19.

- c. **The sun, the moon, and the eleven stars bowed down to me:** The idea of the stars, moon, and sun representing the family of Israel is repeated in Revelation 12:1. That passage speaks of Jesus coming from the nation of Israel.

B. Joseph's brothers sell him into slavery.

- 1. (12-17) Jacob sends Joseph to find his brothers keeping the sheep.
 - a. **To feed their father's flock in Shechem:** There seems nothing strange about this errand, except Joseph's brothers are in **Shechem**, a place where this family was influenced and harmed by worldly influences.
- 2. (18-22) Joseph's brothers plot to kill him.
 - a. **Look, this dreamer is coming!** It isn't hard to see how unwise it was for Joseph to tell his dreams in the way he did. It only made his brothers hate him. They derisively call him **this dreamer**.

b. **We shall see what will become of his dreams!** They decide to defeat Joseph's offending dreams by attacking him. Without intending to, they put Joseph's dreams to the ultimate test. If the dreams really were from God, they cannot be defeated by the hatred of the brothers.

c. **But Reuben heard it, and he delivered him out of their hands: Reuben** - who at another time committed incest with his father's concubine - took a small measure of leadership as the eldest, figuring he could save Joseph from death and rescue him later.

i. Reuben could have simply rose up and said, "This is wrong! We can't do this!" He didn't because he wanted to do right by Joseph without alienating his brothers. His desire to be nice to everyone will fail to prevent a great evil. What the good Reuben wanted to do (**bring him back to his father**) will not happen.

3. (23-28) Joseph is cast into an empty cistern and sold into slavery.

a. **They stripped Joseph of his tunic, the tunic of many colors that was on him:** The **tunic of many colors** was the sign of the father's special favor. The brothers must have had a perverse pleasure as they ripped it off Joseph, and it must have been particularly painful for Joseph to have it torn off him.

i. Each believer in Jesus Christ is given special assurance of the Father's favor. Certainly, many spiritual enemies want to rip from the believer the assurance of the Father's favor.

b. **And they sat down to eat a meal:** The heartless character of these brothers is clear - they could eat a meal with Joseph nearby in the pit. They could sit down and enjoy food while their hearts were bent on murdering their brother.

i. Later, Genesis 42:21 describes the conviction of sin they ignored at that moment. In that passage the brothers said: *We are truly guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear; therefore this distress has come upon us.* When Joseph was cast into the pit, he plead with his brothers, and they ignored his cries as they ate their meal.

ii. This is a shocking demonstration of the depravity of the human heart - but it isn't the last demonstration. For example, in 1995 Susan Smith deliberately drowned her own children and lied to the country about the children being kidnapped. We usually think someone who committed such an act would be overwhelmed by remorse, but her ability to put on a false face about such a horrific crime shows how deceitful our hearts are.

c. **The brothers pulled Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver:** The account is so shocking as to be numbing. We don't know if we should think more highly of Joseph's brothers because they decided to spare his life or less highly of them because they figured they could get rid of him and make a few bucks at the same time. Apparently they considered that their brother was only worth **twenty shekels of silver**.

i. It was **Judah** who said, "After all, he's our brother, so let's only sell him into slavery instead of killing him." And this was the son of Jacob who would become the ancestor of the Messiah.

4. (29-35) They cover their sin and lie to Jacob concerning Joseph's fate.
 - a. **Then Reuben returned to the pit, and indeed Joseph was not in the pit; and he tore his clothes:** Reuben tore his clothes as an expression of utter horror and mourning because his weak stand for righteousness accomplished nothing. Joseph may as well be dead, because his father who loved him so would never see him again.
 - b. **We have found this. Do you know whether it is your son's tunic or not?** This shows the cruelty of the sons of Israel was not directed only towards the favored son, but also towards the father who favored him. This was both a heartless way to bring the news and an unconscionable lie.
 - c. **Jacob tore his clothes:** This was an expression of utter horror and mourning because his loved son is gone.
 - i. This is also a powerful illustration of the principle that if we *believe* something to be so, it may as well be. Joseph was not dead, but as long as Jacob believed he was, as far as Jacob was concerned, Joseph was dead. In the same way, the Christian has in truth been set free from sin, but if Satan can persuade us we are under the tyranny of sin, we may as well be.
5. (36) Joseph ends up in the court of a high Egyptian official.
 - a. **Now the Midianites had sold him in Egypt:** Egypt was a large and thriving kingdom for at least a thousand years before Joseph came. The Egyptians were wealthy and had massive natural resources. They were educated and had no real enemies at the time. When Joseph came to Egypt, some of the pyramids already looked old and the Sphinx was already carved. But in God's eyes, the most impressive thing about Egypt was that Joseph was now there.
 - b. **Sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh and captain of the guard:** Even in the midst of this horror, God did not depart from Joseph. In some ways the story will get worse - and when it does, God will still be with Joseph. God is working not only for Joseph himself, but also for the larger purposes of God's redemptive plan.

References: *The Bible, Guzik, Boice, Clark,*