

Esau Departs

HN 30/05/04pm

Reading: Genesis 36, I Kings 11, John 6:35f

Study: Genesis 36

Psalms: 141:1-4, 137:1-7, 73:23-25, 73:26-28

Here we have the genealogy of Esau, who is Edom. And so we read on name after name of Esau descendants and even onto names of the sons of Seir the Horite who inhabited the land. What are we to make of all these names? Will we just skip over it all? 'Genealogies do not inspire theological reflection but in Genesis they have a most important function'. This is Holy Scripture and it is here for a reason. We may not be able to understand it fully but let us not skip over without seeking to understand what we can.

Genealogies have a function in Genesis. They have a very important function in all Scripture (cf. Matthew 1). You will notice that in I Chronicles 1 much of this chapter is repeated. The book of Chronicles begins with Adam and traces the history of mankind with a special focus upon the people of God from David onwards. It was written to the returned exiles, people who had lost their roots as it were and were asking 'who are the people of God'. Where do we fit into the great plan God? What is his purpose for us in this land?

Back in Genesis 25:12-18 we saw the brief history of Ishmael, Abraham's son who was not chosen to inherit the promise. He had 12 sons who went off to become tribal leaders east of Egypt. So here we have this chapter giving us the history of Esau, Isaac's son who was not chosen to receive the blessing. We have the first and the second generation from Esau who also became chiefs – chiefs in Edom. The next chapter returns to the history of the chosen line.

Many of these names we don't hear of again but some are familiar to us in other parts of Scripture. Eliphaz, Esau's first son with his Hittite wife, married and had his own son Teman. Now both these names are found in Job 2:11. Eliphaz the Temanite was one of Job's comforters. We also find the name Uz in 36:28. Maybe this chapter then gives us some historical setting for the amazing book of Job.

Another name is that of Amalek. In this chapter Moses seems to go out of his way to mention Amalek, for he is the son of a concubine. Moses would have remembered the Amalekites who came against him and the people of God as they came up out of Egypt. Exodus 18:11 – *when Moses held up his hand Israel prevailed and when he let it down Amalek prevailed.*

The sons of Esau were called Edomites who we find again and again in Scripture, usually in the context of opposition to the Israelites, the chosen people of God. They refused Moses permission to pass through their land (Numbers 20) and later were often at war with the king of Israel (I Kings 11, II Kings 14). When Judah went into exile the Edomites gloated over their destruction (Psalm 137:7, Ezekiel 25). This chapter reminds us that these people who so bitterly opposed the people of God for centuries originated from the very brother of Israel, Esau.

Tragically that has been the case down through history even into our present time. The greatest opposition to the people of God does not come from unknown heathens but from those who have *gone out from us because they were not of us* (I John 2:19).

Who betrayed Jesus – one of those who were with him. Who violently opposed Paul in his preaching of the gospel – the Jews? In 1984 many missionaries were forced to leave India not because Hindus opposed them but because people from their own Christian community went and gave bad reports to the police. Lusts of the flesh, love for the world, pride, jealousy, revenge – such things lead to bitterness, strife and division (James 4).

See that no one is *profane like Esau who for one morsel of food sold his birthright* (Hebrews 12). Esau despised his birthright; he despised the promises of God he should have inherited. He turned his back on God and see what happened.

Foreign Wives

Esau took his wives from the daughters of Canaan. Now the names here do not directly match those given back in 26:34, although they do correspond in that they are Hittites and daughters of Elon the Hittite. It is quite possible that names changed with marriage or for other reasons. It may be that he had four and not three wives. So we should not be too disturbed by these differences.

Esau also married into the line of Seir who lived in this land, that later was called Edom. Note the names Anah and Zibeon who were sons of Seir. The Horites or 'cave dwellers' formerly dwelt in Seir we read in Deuteronomy 2:21. *But the descendants of Esau dispossessed them and destroyed them and dwelt in their place* – but not completely it would appear for we have this foreign alliance in marriage.

These foreign wives were a source of grief to Esau's parents. Remember how Abraham refused to allow his son Isaac to take a wife from among the Canaanites. He knew that it was not the will of God to do so. It later became the law of God in Israel. The Lord said to the children of Israel *'you shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you. Surely they will turn away yours hearts after their gods'* (I Kings 11:1).

Solomon did not listen to the word of the Lord nor did he read the history of his own people. For here in history is the record of one of his ancestors who married foreign women, and ended up outside the land of the people of God. Esau stepped out of the covenant promises of God.

Still today this is a most effective strategy of the evil one, a strategy which he uses against the children of God. He lures men and women away from the promises they have in the Lord Jesus Christ through this unequal yoking together in marriage. 2 Corinthians 6:14 is a passage we know well – *do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. What communion has light with darkness?* May the Lord preserve us, our children and all our young people from such alliances.

Left the Land

The second but not altogether unrelated thing we see Esau do is leave the land of promise. We are reminded of Lot who left the presence of Abraham and went off to dwell on the fertile plains of the Jordan. He left the land to dwell away from the presence of the Lord. *Their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together* (13:6). We find the same reasoning here in 36:7 – *for their possessions were too great for them to stay together.* And we make the same comment as we did then – would it not have been better to have fewer possessions and remain together in the land of promise.

We hear it again and again, do we not? The marriage was fine but it broke down because of financial burdens. The struggle to pay off the mansion, or the new car, or something else was such that it tore the marriage apart. Surely it would have been better to get rid of some possessions than to break the marriage.

And it is the same with the fellowship of Gods people, with going to church. Possessions, coveting the things of the world can lead to a separation from the people of God. The rich young ruler could not let go of his possessions and where did he end up – outside the kingdom of God. Esau had great possessions and so he left the land of promise – *he went away from the presence of his brother Jacob.* His brother, remember had the promises of God.

May we never find our possessions coming between us and the Lord. How tragic that people can get their priorities so wrong. I am sure you have seen it happen just as I have. We live in such a materialistic society. The

standard of living people expect is often way beyond their means – hence the worry, the financial struggles, and the breakdown in relationships.

Sometimes I long for the lifestyle of India – although even that is changing now. To get furniture you had to order and wait weeks or months for the man to make it. What a contrast to the massive stores and great range of stuff we have here – not to mention the brochures pushed into the letterbox once or twice a week. We had friends in India who could only buy sausages when they came to our city from their town 400 km away!

Jesus said *seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added unto you.* May we ever do that and never let the things of the world, the greener pastures of the Jordan, or the open hills of Edom, draw us away from the presence of God and the fellowship of his people. In Jesus Christ alone do we have life, life everlasting.

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