

Esau - The End of the Line

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[0 : 00] Now we have here in this chapter, somewhat lengthy, but not exhausted by any means, but for the first couple of generations, an account of the descendants of Esau.

Esau, of course, is the firstborn of Isaac. He is the elder of the two twins, Esau and Jacob. He is the one who ought to have, simply by terms of birth and of the flesh, to have inherited the promise and to have become the bearer of the covenant line in that sense.

But of course, things did not work out that way. God's providence ordered things differently. And what we see and what we know of Esau in earlier chapters, and also perhaps as we see of his descendants here, we see that Isaac's prophecy was true and was right, even in the deception by which it was obtained, that the blessing that he bestowed upon Esau, as well as that upon Jacob, proved to be right and true.

And that Esau was, perhaps, not a bad man. We can understand why he was so frustrated against his brother, why he was at enmity with him for so long, when he felt he had been cheated, when he felt he had been deceived.

And although he wasn't a bad man in that sense, he was completely, totally absorbed by the things of the world and by the gratifying of his worldly appetites, needs, immediate requirements.

[1 : 34] Rather than the things of the things of the Lord, of the spirit or of eternity. These are the generations of Esau, who is Edom.

We are told, of course, in previous chapters, why it is that he is called Edom. Edom means red. And if you remember that when he was born, if we read in chapter 25, when Rebekah came to be delivered, behold, there were twins in a womb.

The first came out red all over, like an hairy garment. And they called his name Esau. And later on, when they were grown up, we read of the occasion, of course, when Jacob, verse 29 of chapter 25, Jacob saw the pottage.

And Esau came from the field and he was faint. And Esau said to Jacob, feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage, for I am faint. Therefore was his name called Edom.

Red. And not only a description of his red colouring and hairiness and so on, but his desire for that which would gratify his hunger.

[2 : 37] The red pottage, the red of Edom, is the same name of the same individual described by these two different names, Esau and Edom the red.

Now, having different names for the same individual might also help us unlock a wee bit about what we're told of his wives. Because it says Esau took his wives of the daughters of Canaan.

And then we've got a list of his wives. Three wives that he takes. And the only difficulty here is that they're different in the names that they are given compared to what we're told about them earlier.

At the end of chapter 26 and into chapter 28, we're told of three different women that Esau takes as his wives. Judith, the daughter of Behi the Hittite. Bashamath, the daughter of Elon the Hittite.

And then in chapter 28, Mahalath, the sister of Nebioth, Ishmael's daughter. Now, we've got three women described in this chapter. Slightly confusingly, there's a Bashamath in this one, but it's obviously a different one.

[3 : 38] Because the Bashamath here is described as sister of Nebioth, Ishmael's daughter. Obviously, you can take her as being Mahalath because the description and her descent and her parentage is obviously a complete total match.

Likewise, with the first Bashamath that we're told in Genesis 26, the daughter of Elon the Hittite. That corresponds exactly to the Ega, who is described here in verse 2, the daughter of Elon the Hittite.

And she's the mother of Eliphaz and so on. Now, when it comes to the first one that is mentioned in Genesis 26, Juneth, the daughter of Behi the Hittite. That doesn't correspond at all to this Aholibama, the daughter of Ena, the daughter of Zibion the Hittite.

So, either there's the possibility that either Judith, the daughter of Behi the Hittite, didn't have any children. Or she had died before he moved to Mount Seir because there's no mention of her.

And Aholibama is somebody completely different. Or, it's again a case of different name and perhaps a slightly more detailed genealogy that's given for her.

[4 : 48] Daughter of Ena, the daughter of Zibion the Hittite. Maybe Zibion and Behi are the same person for all we know. It is confusing. It is confusing that the same individuals might be given different names.

Or it might be that there's a fourth wife, Aholibama. The fact is that whether it's three wives or four, and whether one of them is childless or whether they all produce children to some extent, the thing we can clearly see is that Esau takes his wives, he takes three or four of them, and he takes them of the local Canaanite women, the pagans roundabout.

He marries into the tribes and nations roundabout. It is not a bother to him to do that. He is quite content to do that. Even though his first two wives that he takes, we're told at the end of Genesis 26, were a grief of might to Rebekah and to Isaac.

We don't know whether that's because of their pagan ways or because of their personalities or whatever. But clearly, Isaac and Rebekah were determined that Jacob should marry of the descendants of Abraham, of the covenant line in Abraham's original city of Haran, to which he moved from the Chaldees.

So they want his wife at least to know of the Lord, to be familiar with the God Jehovah, maybe amongst other gods too, but at least to know and to have the worship of the true God.

[6 : 18] Esau takes his wives from amongst the pagan nations roundabout. Whether there's three, whether there's four, it's more likely there's still only three and they've been given different names.

But we're also told of his children, his descendants. We're told that of his three wives, from his three wives, he had five sons. And he had nine grandsons. And it's, yes, okay, that's a perfectly respectable family.

But, you know, it's not a huge number from having so many wives. Some people have much more, even from just one. But still, the Lord, we see, is partly fulfilling his promise to Abraham.

If you remember back in Genesis 15, it says, God says to Abraham, He takes him abroad and he says, you know, behold, now look and see.

Look toward heaven and tell the stars that thou be able to number them. And he said, so shall thy seed be. And he's not saying your covenant line will be so numerous. He's not saying that all these people will be true worshippers of God.

[7 : 22] But what God is saying, apart from the fact that the covenant line will continue through him, and ultimately all nations of the world will be blessed through Abraham's descent, but also to this old childless man, to whom childlessness was a shame, and it was something for which he would be ashamed and what he would be, you know, embarrassed about, he says, your descendants will multiply as the stars of heaven.

And this is part of the promise here. Because although these are just physical descendants, although Ishmael multiplies his descendants, Esau multiplies his descendants, these are all descendants of Abraham and of Isaac.

And God is keeping his promise to Abraham. That's the first point we need to recognize here, that even in the multiplying of physical, non-spiritual, non-covenant line children, God is fulfilling his promise to Abraham.

God keeps his word. God always keeps his word. Second thing we should see here is that Esau is obviously very blessed in terms of his material wealth.

He took his wives, his sons, his daughters, all the persons of his house and his capital, all his beasts and his substance which he got in the land of Canaan, went into the country from the face of his brother Jacob. For their riches were more than that they might dwell together.

[8 : 48] And the land where they were strangers could not bear them because of their capital. Thus dwell Esau in Mount Seir, Esau is Edom. Now there is a sense here, although it's not spoken explicitly, just as it says how at the end of Abraham's life, how he sent away the sons of Keturah, his second wife and Ishmael, and any children from concubines or whatever that were sent away.

He gave them gifts and he sent them away and said, you know, go make your own way in the world. And he kept Isaac with them. He kept Isaac in the land of promise and he kept him near at hand. And the suggestion, reading between the lines here, is likewise that Isaac in his lifetime, in order that Jacob should have a clear run for the land of Canaan, the land of promise, Esau is sent away by Isaac.

Not that he's moaning and groaning about it. They have to practically separate because of the amount of wealth they've got. But Esau is to go and make his way in the world as best he can. And this is not a problem to him.

He is blessed with great riches. God keeps his word. Esau has chosen to build his house, his treasure in this world. And God acknowledges and accepts that.

This is what you want. This world is what you want. You want to build on sand. That's fine. Here's your house. It's built on sand of when the floods come and the storms come, it won't last. But here it is. This is what you want.

[10 : 16] This is what I'll give you. Riches were more than they might dwell together. And the land where any more strangers could not bear them because of their power. If we seek to make this world our treasure, if we seek to make this world and all it can give, our heart's desire, then God will give you that.

God will give you the blessings of this world. It will give your heart's desire here. But what a price if that's what we truly desire. The generations of Esau then are listed.

And they're not vast. They're respectable. They're multiplying. Yes. But one thing you should know is this curious expression here. These, verse 15, were the dukes of the sons of Esau.

Now, in other translations after the authorized version, tend to translate this term as chieftains or chiefs in a sense. And this is probably how it should be understood. We think of dukes.

And we think of a big royal procession, the state opening of parliament, and all the finery, and all the great big stately homes, and glittering jewels, and so on. And that's not the original sense of the word.

- [11 : 23] We might ask you, why does the authorized version here translate this term as dukes? What is meant here? Well, remember that at the time when this translation was made, there weren't actually that many dukes in the United Kingdom, as it was.

There was still a King James this day, King James VI, 1611, when the authorized version was translated. There would be maybe one or two dukes in England. There were no dukes in Scotland outside of the royal thing.

Duke of Rothstein was a royal title, but there weren't any other dukes. No dukes in Ireland. One or two in England, but not many. It wasn't a multiplied kind of title that it became in later generations.

Where does this term come from? Why have the translators used this particular term, when perhaps chiefs or chieftains might be better? Probably, if we think in terms of, you know, Adam's sheiks controlling their own fiefdom, answering perhaps to a king, but pretty much autonomous within their own sphere of influence.

Why do they use this term in translation? Well, the term duke is, you know, just like the French duke, and comes from the Latin dukes.

- [12 : 46] Some schools, of course, still have the term dukes. It means leader. It doesn't mean the highest academic achiever. It means leader. Some of these are the dukes of the school. They're taken as being the leader of the school.

And this term in the Latin dukes was originally a military title. In the days before the Roman emperors, when Rome was still a republic, it referred to a military commander without official rank, especially one of either Germanic or Celtic origin, apparently.

It later came to mean the commander of a Roman province. If there was a particular province in the Roman Empire, the duke or dukes would be the one who was in control, the military control of that province.

And of course, although eventually he would answer to the emperor, within his own sphere, his own province, as far as military rule was concerned, he was the one completely in charge.

He didn't answer to anyone. It would seem that this military origin of the term, which caused the authorised version translators to use it, mindful as we say that in 1611, there were hardly any dukes in England.

- [14 : 02] There were none in Scotland, none in Ireland in that sense. So it didn't have the connotations that it does now, but it did have this military origin.

Duke in French, dukes in Latin, military province governor. And this military background, probably, remember what Isaac prophesies about his son.

Genesis 27, verses 39 and 40. Isaac, his father, answered and said, And behold, thy dwelling shall be the fatness of the earth and of the dew of heaven from above.

And by thy sword shalt thou live, and shalt serve thy brother, and it shall come to pass, when thou shalt have the dominion, that thou shalt break his yoke from off thine deck.

In other words, Isaac's prophecy, his blessing that he bestows, and his elder son, is one that he will be a warrior prince. He will live by the sword.

- [14 : 59] It will be a military warlord culture that he establishes. He will live by his sword, a sword-based society. He will have warlords and violence.

And this is further suggested, if you were to look ahead to Deuteronomy, you see in chapter 2 in Deuteronomy, where the Israelites are warned, in verses 4 and 5, by the Lord, and it says, Command thou the people, saying, ye are to pass through the coast of your brethren, the children of Esau, which dwell in Seah, and they shall be afraid of you.

Take ye good heed unto yourselves, therefore meddle not with them, for I will not give you of their land, no, not so much as a food bread, because I have given Mount Seah unto Esau for a possession.

Okay, fine, that's their inheritance, given them by the Lord, but how did they go about getting this land? Well, we know that Esau intermarried with the tribes round about.

He also intermarried with the daughters of the Horites, the Horites, who were the original inhabitants of Mount Seah. We see in that same chapter, Deuteronomy chapter 2, at verse 12, Now, the Horites also dwelt in Seah before time, but the children of Esau succeeded them when they had destroyed them from before them, and dwelt in their stead, as Israel did unto the land of his possession, which the Lord gave unto them.

[16 : 27] Now, verse 22, As he did to the children of Esau, which dwelt in Seah, when he destroyed the Horites from before them, and they succeeded them, and dwelt in their stead, even unto this day.

So Esau and his entourage went down to Mount Seah, which is south of the Dead Sea. They settled, they intermarried, and then eventually they destroyed and drove out the original inhabitants, a warlord culture, of violence and possession, and of living by the sword.

Dukes, warlord chiefs. I would suggest to you, this is probably why this old translation has taken this title. Now we understand something different by the term, but in those days, that is probably what it would have implied.

These descendants of Esau then, we find in verse 24, and the Horems, the original inhabitants, they are also listed amongst the Edomites, from verse 20 onwards. Again, another translation question mark here, we find that verse 24, these are the children of Zidion, or Aja and Ana.

This was that Ana that found the mules in the wilderness, as he fed the asses of Zidion his father. Now the word in the Hebrew that has been translated mules, it can mean that, but it can also mean water, or springs.

[17 : 50] And we have to say, well, okay, it's not an inaccurate translation, but it's a choice the translators have made. Which is possibly more likely? You're busy feeding asses, or donkeys. Now, a mule is a cross between a donkey and a horse.

You cannot breed mules. You can only have one mule at a time. You can't put two mules together and make more mules, because each one is itself a cross between a donkey and a horse that have bred together.

So if there's mules in the plural, then there's going to be a whole lot of these individual crosses between horses and donkeys that just happen to be in the wilderness.

Well, it's possible. It's possible, but it's less likely. Now, when you're busy feeding donkeys in the wilderness, then suddenly you come across all these mules. It's possible. Probably, it's more likely to be, as other translations give it, either water, as the New King James has it, or springs, hot springs, as many of the other translations also put it, because the same word can mean that.

It can mean springs or water supply. Either way, such a discovery of water in the desert, of springs, whether hot or cold or whatever, this was a discovery that was a big deal in a desert and warrior-based society.

[19:11] And this will be why it is mentioned as an important event here at verse 24. Now, the native Horites, which I described here in verse 20 onwards, they, as we say, intermarried with the descendants of Esau, but they eventually destroyed them.

The dukes are warlord people. And then we've got kings from verse 31 onwards. These are the kings that reigned in the land of Edom. We think, wow, they've got kings down there on Mount Seir when the Israelites don't have anything, you know, but there is no royal dynasty.

Now, if you think back to the history of northern Israel, the breakaway kingdom, after they separated from Judah, after the days of Solomon, what you would find was there that whoever became king, it would be a strong man or a military commander, he would wipe out all his adversaries, all his competitors, and then he would reign for so many years, and then his son would succeed him, but the son wouldn't be as strong as the father, so somebody would murder him, and then they would come in his place, another strong man would take his place, he would reign for so many years, his son would succeed, and then somebody would murder him, so in other words, they didn't build up dynasties in northern Israel, because everything was breaking down, there wasn't a smooth transfer of authority from generation to generation, now of course, Proverbs tells us this, chapter 27, verse 24, riches are not forever, and that the crown endure to every generation, and if you look from verse 31 onwards, what you see is that you don't see a descending dynasty of one king succeeded by his son, succeeded by another, succeeded by another, his grandson, and so on, each one is individually different, each one is a completely different person from a completely different place, now, some have suggested this means, oh yes, well they probably elected their king, perhaps democracy wasn't that well known in those days, it may just be that the strong warlords all decided, right, who's the one that's going to lead us, right, so and so, now the other one's dead, he can be king over us and we'll give him our allegiance, now when he dies, we get a completely new one, if he was elected, he would only be elected from amongst the warrior chieftains, and clearly, it is by the sword that these kings reigned, there were kings in Edom, but there were no royal dynasties, there was royal honour for the Edomites long before ever the Israelites had a king, and as another commentator has pointed out, you know, if you look ahead to when Joseph is down in Egypt, and when his brothers come down with them, and they said,

Pharaoh said unto his brother, what is your occupation? And they said unto Pharaoh, thy servants are shepherds, both we and also our fathers, Esau's sons were kings when Jacob's were just plain shepherds, and it might seem as though, well come on, the Esau's descendants, they're getting ahead, they're warrior chiefs, they're kings, they've got so much land that it can't support them all, they're really doing well, they're coming on in the world, they're making quite a name for themselves, well, commentator Matthew Henry says this, he says, in external prosperity and honour, the children of the covenant are often cast behind, and those that are out of the covenant get the start, the triumphing of the wicked may be quick, but it is short, soon ripe, and as soon rotten, I'll read that very again, the triumphing of the wicked may be quick, but it is short, soon ripe, and as soon forgotten, but the products of the promise, though they are slow, are sure, and lasting, and then he quotes

Habakkuk, chapter 2, verse 3, at the end, it shall speak, and not lie, what we see here with the descendants of Edom, the descendants of Esau, is that they have their possession, they have their mount seer for their possession and for their inheritance, when the Israelites were still dwelling in the house of bondage, Israel went down into Egypt, and yes, they survived the famine because of that, because the Lord sent Joseph ahead of them, but once they were there, a couple of hundred years, they became slaves, while Esau's descendants became kings, and they had their house of bondage, while Esau's descendants had their house of possession, their Canaan, the Israelites' Canaan, was only a land of promise, it was promised to them, but it was not their possession, not yet, the children of this world have their all in hand, and nothing in hope, while the children of God have their all in hope, and next to nothing in hand,

[24 : 29] I would suggest to you that this is one reason why this chapter has been preserved for us. It lists the descendants of Esau for the first couple of generations, and then they multiply and diversify and so on, and the Lord does not inspire his writers to track the genealogy of the descendants of Esau all the way down through the generations.

You don't have elements of Esau's descendants going all the way down to the time of Christ in the way that you do for Abrahams and Isaacs and Jacobs. You don't have a covenant line for Esau.

This is as far as it goes. He gets his possession. He becomes a powerful people. His sons become dukes and warlords and kings.

They have their all and they have it here and they have it now. And they have it in hand and they have nothing now in hope. in the letter to the Hebrews we read chapter 6 verse 30 when God made promise to Abraham because he could swear by no greater he swore by himself saying surely blessing I will bless thee and multiplying I will multiply thee and so after he had patiently endured he obtained the promise.

So after he had patiently endured he obtained the promise. Turn a couple of pages and you find in chapter 10 verse 23 this is what the Lord has caused to be written down.

[26 : 08] Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering for he is faithful that promise. it is of the nature of a promise that it is not yet in your hand.

It is the nature of being faithful and fulfilling of a promise at the appointed time that it is not right yet this minute. Esau has it all in his hand but he has nothing as yet in hope.

Israel's inheritance is still a land of promise still to be fulfilled still yet to be inherited. That means he doesn't have it yet and he doesn't have it now but he is faithful that promise and of course we know that all of these things are only pointing us on pointing us on to the ultimate holy land the ultimate kingdom the ultimate inheritance the ultimate land of promise which because it is a promise we do not have yet in our hand now faith is the substance of things hoped for the evidence of things not seen Esau has it all in front of him his descendants inherit the substance the possession they have the tangible inheritance the land the wealth the riches the royal honors the power of the sword they have it all and they have it now but what they cannot do is make it last

God is not mocked and he deals fairly with the sons of men Esau's whole life and character has been to desire I want it all and I want it now and God says okay here you go here is a possession for you here is Mount Seir whilst my people Israel go down to Egypt while they are bond slaves while they are brutally treated 400 years in Egypt you have your kingship you have your warrior chiefs you have your dukes you have your possession your flocks and herds you are a powerful nation while they are a band of slaves the day will come when they shall enter into their inheritance yes through many a trial and turmoil and conflict with me but they will inherit and so likewise the Lord's people the children of the coven will inherit because he is faithful that promise it is better at the end of the day to have

Canaan in Thomas than to have Mount Seir in possession it is better to have that which the Lord has laid before us and to apprehend it by faith and to lay hold upon the promise than to have our little pile of goodies here in the world you can have your house built on sand and you can have it quickly but it is the foolish man who built his house upon the sand and when the rains came and the floods rose and the winds blew great was the flaw of it Mount Seir is one thing where is Mount Seir what is Mount Seir it is a portion of land and a mountainous region to the south of the Dead Sea the territory of Edom stretches all the way south to the Gulf of Aquaba it is that strip desert and mountain and yes pasture land but power there they had south of the

[29 : 54] Dead Sea all the way to the right hand arm of the Red Sea it is not actually a vast area it is not as rich and wealthy as the promised land but of course the Israelites didn't have it yet supposing Esau could have had all of Mount Seir and of Canaan would he have taken it of course he would supposing you could have that Mount Seir and Canaan and all of Arabia while you're at it and Egypt too and Babylonia and Persia and all the Roman Empire would that be good would it be good for a while oh for a while and if you could stretch across all the continents and God could give that into your hand would you take it oh yes let's have it all for what shall profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul Esau sold his birthright for a mess of pottage a meal now fill my belly now meet my need now give me what I want

I want it all and I want it now and the Lord gave him exactly what he had and the Lord offers to us too the choice you can build your house in the sand and have it quickly or you can build your house upon the rock of your salvation and that will take longer and that will take time and you won't see the immediate results and you won't have your inheritance yet in your hand but you will have it in promise and he is faithful that promised and of Abraham and he said that when he had faithfully endured he obtained the promise faith is the substance of things hoped for the evidence of things not seen this is the inheritance of the Lord's people this is what they have laid up for them an eternity which will never fade away a promise an inheritance which is not geographically confined or even confined to a world which we are told will at the last melt and be destroyed and burned up with fire heat we are promised an inheritance which is of the substance of a new heaven and a new earth that fade if not away it is better to have Canaan in promise than that seen in possession it is better to have your soul and its inheritance and to trust in the one who alone is able to deliver that soul for all eternity than to have all the world in your hand now knowing that you cannot stop it from slipping through your fingers if you had all the world for all your life the pages of the calendar would still keep turning the lines would still keep appearing in the mirror the wrinkles in your hand would keep on increasing the stoop would increase still on your back you cannot hold back time and you cannot ensure yourself for eternity saved by the blood of Christ the lamb slain from the foundation of the world why is this recorded of Esau here this I would suggest to you is God's last epitaph of love for the son of his saint

Isaac the son of his faithful patriarch and this is his child and these are his grandchildren these are his descendants and for the sake of the fathers here it is recorded as though one's stood solemnly and with dignity at the graveside of one who all his life had denied and wanted nothing to do with the living God and we watched the coffin being lowered into the ground and we walk away in sorrow because we know that if the Bible is true then we know where such a soul will now be and here we see this chapter and all Esau's riches and his inheritance and his dukedoms and his kingships but we do not see it appear again at the end of this chapter at the last full stop we read of the Edomites again but they are enemies to Israel they are at war with them or they are seeking to take advantage of their weakness they are no longer brethren this is the last time

Esau is recorded in any kind of relation to his covenant father and the covenant line it is like watching a ship with somebody you love on it going over the horizon and you wait till the ship goes out of sight and you stand on the station platform and you watch the train disappear till it goes finally round the bend and out of sight this is what this chapter is for Esau it is the departing train it is the ship disappearing over the horizon because we have this chapter for Esau and we have no more his story is over as far as God's covenant work is concerned and our story in this world will end one day don't let it be over forever what shall it profit a man that he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul it is better to have Canaan in promise than Manseer in possession it is better to have Christ in the land of the living than all the world and death that follows with it this is

God's last honouring of the son of his patriarch and we turn the page and the story moves on and the future belongs with the children of the covenant that is made of the covenant