

THE GENERATIONS OF ESAU

GENESIS 36

The book of Genesis has been outlined in a number of different ways, but one way that is often overlooked is to see it divided into the ten places where we see the formula: “These are the generations...” used as a refrain. It is a formula that takes place throughout the entire book. In the second chapter we read of the generations of the heaven and earth. After that, we read of the generations of Adam, of Noah, of Shem, of Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac. Now we come to still another generation. It is the record of the generations of Esau.

A GENERATIONAL HERITAGE

*Now these are the records of the generations of Esau (that is, Edom).
(Genesis 36:1).*

As we read through this chapter, we are confronted with a very long list of names and places that are unfamiliar to us. If the truth were told, we are usually inclined to skip this section and to precede on to the next chapter. In doing so, we would miss some hidden treasures that lie waiting for us to discover.

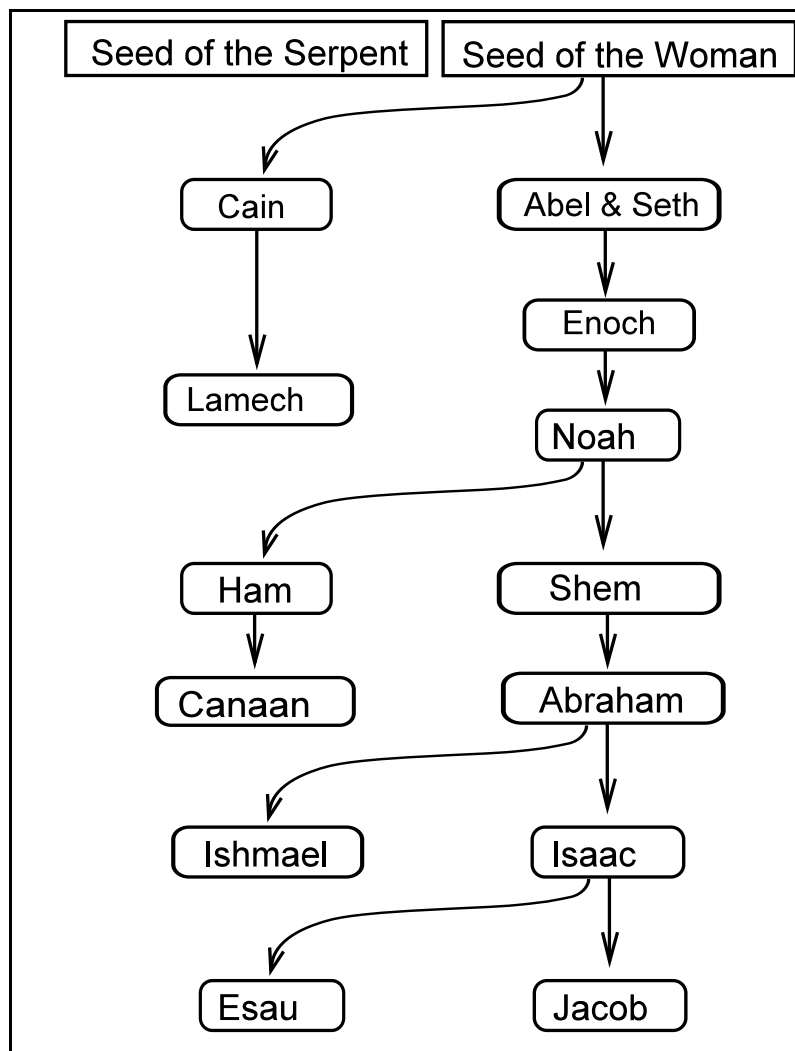
When we hear this reference to generations, it should serve as a reminder to us of something that we have been seeing all throughout the book of Genesis. It is a promise of two seeds.

You will recall the setting in which this promise was made. It was the Garden of Eden. The first man and the first woman had eaten of the forbidden fruit. This brought about a terrible change. Whereas before the Garden had been a place of love, now this love was replaced by a bitter enmity.

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise Him on the heel. (Genesis 3:15).

This verse provides the theme of the rest of Genesis. This will be a book about two seeds: On the one hand will be the seed of the woman. Everyone person who has ever been born has been a descendant of Adam and Eve by default. They are the progenitors of the human race. But there is something more that is taking place in this passage than a natural uneasiness in the presence of snakes.

The seed of the woman is ultimately Jesus Christ. He was born of a virgin and without the contribution of a man. In a very real sense, he can be called “the seed of the woman.” He is seen in contrast to the seed of the serpent. The serpent is a reference to the person of Satan. In Revelation 12 we see Satan described as “that old serpent.” There are two promised seeds and they are not merely the physical seeds. They are the spiritual descendants of Christ and Satan.



Genesis is a book about two seeds. God initially created all life to reproduce after its kind. But man rebelled and sinned against God. And so, a promise was given. It was a promise of TWO SEEDS.

The promise is found in Genesis 3:15. The first seed was to be the seed of the serpent. It was the seed of rebellion. It was the seed of sin. It was made up of all who walked in the way of Adam in turning against God.

But there is also a second seed promised. It is the seed of the woman. This second seed

is set over against the first seed. The two seeds are at war with one another. And God has decreed that the second seed shall ultimately win.

From our vantage point, we know that this second seed is ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ - the One who was bruised for our iniquities as He crushed underfoot the Serpent's Head.

The rest of Genesis is the story of these two seeds. First we read of Cain and Abel. Although they are brothers descended from the same father and mother, Cain shows himself to be of the spiritual seed of the serpent by murdering his brother. But God replaces murdered Abel with Seth.

We see the genealogy of each. Cain's seed leads us to Lamech - a man who is willing not only to murder a man, but to compose a song in which he boasts of his deed. Seth's seed leads us to Enoch who walks with God, and from there to Noah who is spared the destruction of the Flood.

But the story does not stop there. Noah has three sons. And one of them performs an evil deed which demonstrates that he is of the spiritual seed of the serpent. He and his descendants through Canaan are cursed (the impact of this was not missed on the Israelites to whom Moses wrote the book of Genesis). Noah's other son, Shem, is given the promise of blessing.

The Babel Rebellion is an account of men trying to make a SHEM for themselves (*Shem* is the Hebrew word for "name"). They are dispersed among the nations.

But one is called out to be a blessing to the nations. His name is Abraham. He has two sons. One is seen to be the seed of the serpent - he is cast out. The other is of the spiritual seed of God. He is Isaac.

Isaac also has two sons. They are twins. The one is Jacob while the other is the person who is the subject of this particular chapter. He is Esau. He has already given some indication of whose seed he is. He has shown no particular interest in the birthright of God. He was willing to trade his spiritual birthright for a bowl of stew. By that action, Esau was showing something about himself. He was showing his spiritual heritage. He was showing that he was spiritually of the seed of the serpent.

I am not saying this in order that you might point to the Edomites or to Esau and say, "Shame on you!" It is said in order that you might ask the question, "Whose seed am I? Am I following the Lord, or have I been following in the footsteps of the serpent?"

If you have come to trust in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, then you have been born again. There is a new seed. *You have been born again not of seed which is*

perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God (1 Peter 1:23).

ESAU'S CANAANITE WIVES

Esau took his wives from the daughters of Canaan: Adah the daughter of Elon the Hittite, and Oholibamah the daughter of Anah and the granddaughter of Zibeon the Hivite; ³ also Basemath, Ishmael's daughter, the sister of Nebaioth. ⁴ And Adah bore Eliphaz to Esau, and Basemath bore Reuel, ⁵ and Oholibamah bore Jeush and Jalam and Korah. These are the sons of Esau who were born to him in the land of Canaan. (Genesis 36:2-5).

Marriages in the ancient world were often arranged by the parents. It was for this reason that Abraham had made his servant Eliakim swear an oath that he would not choose a wife for Isaac from among the daughters of the Canaanites (Genesis 24:3). In the same way, Jacob had been sent by his father to Haran with explicit instructions that he not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan (Genesis 28:1).

What was wrong with the Canaanites? They were idolaters. They worshiped false gods and they would infect the people of God with those same false systems of worship.

There is an old saying that goes: "The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world." There is a lot of truth to that statement. Women have a tremendous ability to influence their children. There is a sense in which the continuation of Christianity is always dependent upon the evangelization of the next generation and this ministry lies primarily in the hands of Christian mothers.

Esau took a number of wives. And to make matters worse, all of these wives were from among the Canaanites. They brought their false gods into the marriage with them.

There is no more important decision that a man or woman can make than in the matter of marriage. The Bible is very specific in its command. Believers are not to marry unbelievers.

Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? ¹⁵ Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? (2 Corinthians 6:14-15).

If I may be so bold, I want to make an observation. It is not necessarily a Scriptural

observation and I might well be going beyond the bounds of Scripture to say what I am going to say. Here it is: You will likely never marry someone you do not first date. I know many a Christian who has taken the role of playing with fire by dating an unbeliever. Soon, the emotions have come into play and this same believer is trying to either decide what to do or else to justify the desired actions.

THE LAND OF EDOM

Then Esau took his wives and his sons and his daughters and all his household, and his livestock and all his cattle and all his goods which he had acquired in the land of Canaan, and went to another land away from his brother Jacob. ⁷ For their property had become too great for them to live together, and the land where they sojourned could not sustain them because of their livestock. ⁸ So Esau lived in the hill country of Seir; Esau is Edom. (Genesis 36:6-8).

There came a time when Esau and his family made a decision to depart from the Promised Land. They moved southward to the area to the south of the Dead Sea and settled here. It has been suggested that this establishes something of a contrast between Jacob and Esau. While the story of Jacob is about his quest to return to the Promised Land, here we see Esau turning his back on the Promised Land to go and live in another place.

As Moses writes the book of Genesis, the children of Israel are in the wilderness. They will eventually be heading for the Promised Land, but to go there, they will have to make a detour. The detour will be around the land of Edom. It will be a detour around the descendants of Esau.

They will be told that they are not to disturb the people of Edom, because that land has been given to them as their possession in the same way that the Promised Land has been promised to the children of Israel.

THE FAMILY OF ESAU

These then are the records of the generations of Esau the father of the Edomites in the hill country of Seir. ¹⁰ These are the names of Esau's sons: Eliphaz the son of Esau's wife Adah, Reuel the son of Esau's wife Basemath. ¹¹ And the sons of Eliphaz were Teman, Omar, Zepho and Gatam and Kenaz. ¹² And Timna was a concubine of Esau's son Eliphaz and she bore Amalek to Eliphaz. These are the sons of Esau's wife Adah.

¹³ And these are the sons of Reuel: Nahath and Zerah, Shammah and

Mizzah. These were the sons of Esau's wife Basemath. 14 And these were the sons of Esau's wife Oholibamah, the daughter of Anah and the granddaughter of Zibeon: she bore to Esau, Jeush and Jalam and Korah. 15 These are the chiefs of the sons of Esau. The sons of Eliphaz, the first-born of Esau, are chief Teman, chief Omar, chief Zepho, chief Kenaz, 16 chief Korah, chief Gatam, chief Amalek. These are the chiefs descended from Eliphaz in the land of Edom; these are the sons of Adah. 17 And these are the sons of Reuel, Esau's son: chief Nahath, chief Zerah, chief Shammah, chief Mizzah. These are the chiefs descended from Reuel in the land of Edom; these are the sons of Esau's wife Basemath. 18 And these are the sons of Esau's wife Oholibamah: chief Jeush, chief Jalam, chief Korah. These are the chiefs descended from Esau's wife Oholibamah, the daughter of Anah. 19 These are the sons of Esau (that is, Edom), and these are their chiefs.

20 These are the sons of Seir the Horite, the inhabitants of the land: Lotan and Shobal and Zibeon and Anah, 21 and Dishon and Ezer and Dishan. These are the chiefs descended from the Horites, the sons of Seir in the land of Edom. 22 And the sons of Lotan were Hori and Hemam; and Lotan's sister was Timna. 23 And these are the sons of Shobal: Alvan and Manahath and Ebal, Shepho and Onam. 24 And these are the sons of Zibeon: Aiah and Anah-- he is the Anah who found the hot springs in the wilderness when he was pasturing the donkeys of his father Zibeon. 25 And these are the children of Anah: Dishon, and Oholibamah, the daughter of Anah. 26 And these are the sons of Dishon: Hemdan and Eshban and Ithran and Cheran. 27 These are the sons of Ezer: Bilhan and Zaavan and Akan. 28 These are the sons of Dishan: Uz and Aran. 29 These are the chiefs descended from the Horites: chief Lotan, chief Shobal, chief Zibeon, chief Anah, 30 chief Dishon, chief Ezer, chief Dishan. These are the chiefs descended from the Horites, according to their various chiefs in the land of Seir. (Genesis 36:9-29).

This listing of Esau's descendants is given with very little in the way of additional material. That is not to say that these people never did anything. Verse 23 mentions a person named Anah *who found the hot springs in the wilderness when he was pasturing the donkeys of his father Zibeon*. This is a clue that there were a great many events that took place in the lives of these people who worked and who played and who married and who raised children. But almost none of it is recorded here.

There is a lesson that we can learn from this. It is possible for you to have your life full of all sorts of details of living and yet to still be spiritually empty. A lot could have been said about the lives that were led by the children of Esau, but virtually nothing is said because there was seemingly a lack of spiritual life.

What will be said about your life at the end of your days? Was it a life of trivia? Or will it have been a life that was spent in the service of the King of kings?

THE KINGS OF EDOM

Now these are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom before any king reigned over the sons of Israel. ³² Bela the son of Beor reigned in Edom, and the name of his city was Dinhabah. ³³ Then Bela died, and Jobab the son of Zerah of Bozrah became king in his place. ³⁴ Then Jobab died, and Husham of the land of the Temanites became king in his place. ³⁵ Then Husham died, and Hadad the son of Bedad, who defeated Midian in the field of Moab, became king in his place; and the name of his city was Avith. ³⁶ Then Hadad died, and Samlah of Masrekah became king in his place. ³⁷ Then Samlah died, and Shaul of Rehoboth on the Euphrates River became king in his place. ³⁸ Then Shaul died, and Baal-hanan the son of Achbor became king in his place. ³⁹ Then Baal-hanan the son of Achbor died, and Hadar became king in his place; and the name of his city was Pau; and his wife's name was Mehetabel, the daughter of Matred, daughter of Mezahab. (Genesis 36:31-39).

This paragraph sets forth a listing of the kings who reigned over the land of Edom. We are specifically told that these kings *reigned in the land of Edom before any king reigned over the sons of Israel* (36:31). This presents us with a problem. If we read that this was before *any king reigned over the sons of Israel*, then it would seem to presuppose that the author is aware of a time when there would be kings who reigned over the sons of Israel. This statement has been used by critics of the Bible to insist that Moses could not have been the author of Genesis.

What shall we say to such a criticism? There are two possible solutions that have been proposed:

1. Richard Pratt, professor of Old Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary, notes that Moses was the author of the major part of the Pentateuch without necessarily being the final editor of each portion of the text. Therefore Pratt would reason that such a passage as is found here could well have been added by a later editor and need not be attributed to Moses.

While I agree that Dr. Pratt's solution is within the bounds of Christian Orthodoxy and that he continues to hold to such doctrines as inerrancy and the inspiration of the Scriptures, I feel that there may be an alternate solution.

2. Moses demonstrates a prophetic understanding that the future of Israel will see a time when it shall be governed by kings. Deuteronomy 17:14 is specific to say that there shall come a time when the Israelites shall seek to be led by a king. Moses wishes to state for the record that Edom has already embarked upon a policy of being ruled by kings.

Why is this particularly significant? It is significant because the desire for a king was not necessarily a good thing. It came from a desire to be like other nations.

When my daughter was a little girl, we would often hear the plaintive cry, “But all of the other kids are doing it!” That usually came when we wanted to do something that we thought might not be in her best interest.

The Israelites would eventually do the same thing in their desire to be led by a king. They would ask the Lord for a king and then, much later, they would ask the Lord to take him back.

The descendants of Edom are seen here and they are already following in the ways of the world. They appoint for themselves a king merely because “everyone else is doing it.”

CONCLUSION

Now these are the names of the chiefs descended from Esau, according to their families and their localities, by their names: chief Timna, chief Alvah, chief Jetheth, ⁴¹ chief Oholibamah, chief Elah, chief Pinon, ⁴² chief Kenaz, chief Teman, chief Mibzar, ⁴³ chief Magdiel, chief Iram. These are the chiefs of Edom (that is, Esau, the father of the Edomites), according to their habitations in the land of their possession. (Genesis 36:40-43).

This chapter closes with a listing of some of the chieftains. These were the leaders of some of the tribes who made up the Edomites. As our chapter closes, they are seen carrying on the legacy of Esau. It is a legacy that holds the spiritual birthright in low esteem. It is a legacy of the secular.

Can I tell you the rest of the story? It is found in the last book of the Old Testament. It is found in the words of the Lord in the book of Malachi.

“I have loved you,” says the LORD. But you say, “How hast Thou loved us?” “Was not Esau Jacob's brother?” declares the LORD. “Yet I have loved Jacob; ³ but I have hated Esau, and I have made his mountains a

*desolation, and appointed his inheritance for the jackals of the wilderness.”
4 Though Edom says, “We have been beaten down, but we will return and build up the ruins”; thus says the LORD of hosts, “They may build, but I will tear down; and men will call them the wicked territory, and the people toward whom the LORD is indignant forever.” (Malachi 1:2-4).*

The Lord eventually brought a desolation and a destruction upon the land of Edom. This was due, in part, to the fact that Edom set itself up against the people of God when the Babylonians came to destroy Jerusalem. When Nebuchadnezzar went to destroy the Temple of God, the people of Edom lined up to cheer and to make a profit at Judah’s expense. Obadiah 1:13 speaks of how the Edomites gloated over Judah in the day of her disaster and how they looted their wealth in the day of their distress.

Yet even after this, Edom was given a second chance. Many years after the words of Malachi, a king came to power from the land of Edom. His name was Herod the Great. It was under his reign that Jesus was born. The Lord actually sent magi from the east to tell Herod about this wonderful event.

What was his reaction? Did he seek to come and worship Jesus? His pretense was exactly that. But it was only a pretense and a sham. In reality, he sought to murder the baby Jesus.

In doing so, he was demonstrating the continuing legacy of Esau. It was a legacy of kings who set themselves up in place of God. It was the legacy of the secular. It was the legacy of those who had no interest in the things of the Lord and who were willing to trade away a spiritual heritage for a cup of stew.

How about you? Are spiritual things your “cup of tea?” Or as we would say in Edom, “Are they your cup of stew?” You are being given an invitation today. It is an invitation to come and to worship the King of kings.