

Esau's story

Before passing from the story of Jacob to the story of Joseph, one chapter is concerned with Esau. Genesis follows the story of a family line, but as different parts of the family-line are left behind we are given glimpses of what happens to the lesser lines of descent, before saying farewell to them.

☞¹ 36:1
☞² 36:1–4
☞³ 36:5–19
☞⁴ 34:20–28
☞⁵ 34:29–30
☞⁶ 34:31–39

• *His background*

So after the announcement of a new heading ☞¹ we read of Esau's sons ☞² and Edom's chiefs ☞³, and then of more sons of Seir ☞⁴ and more chiefs ☞⁵. Kingship was functioning in Edom before there was kingship in Israel ☞⁶. Genesis 34:40–43 mentions eleven districts of Edom with its eleven rulers.

• *Esau's bad beginning*

Esau had a bad beginning. He was spoilt by his father and tricked by his brother. He was strictly Isaac's firstborn son but from the beginning it had been announced to Rebekah that the family promises would come into being through Jacob not through Esau. In the event Esau preferred worldly pleasures to spiritual achievement ☞¹. He preferred a plate of food in the here-and-now above the ultimate blessing of being used by God ☞². He got on well with pagan women ☞³ and disgraced his family ☞⁴ by the way he lived.

☞¹ see 25:30
☞² see 25:32
☞³ 24:3–4
☞⁴ 26:34–35

• *Yet with time he developed a regard for the things of God*

Yet despite his bad beginning and despite his delayed interest in his inheritance, it seems that he did develop a regard for the things of God. One might guess that he came to faith in the God of his fathers as he was going out with four hundred men to slaughter Jacob. Jacob wrestled with God and overcame both God and man. Esau seems to have come to new attitudes as a result of Jacob's praying. Certainly by the time he met with Jacob his heart had changed ☞¹. But it was too late for total spiritual recovery, and the New Testament uses the early life of Esau to warn us against persistently neglecting our inheritance so that eventually we lose it although we do not lose our position in the family of God ☞².

☞¹ see 33:1–12
☞² see Hebrews 12:16

• *God gave him blessings*

Although he was not the chosen channel of the line towards Israel and towards Jesus, yet God gave him many blessings that were shadows of the blessings that would come to the world through Jesus.

• *He had three major wives*

Esau had three major wives ☞¹. Their names are different from those mentioned in 26:34–35 and 28:9. He probably had many wives and only three major wives are being mentioned.

☞¹ 36:1–3

• *He moved into his own territory*

Esau had five sons mentioned in 36:4–5. Esau moved into his own territory, in circumstances which are outlined in 36:6–8. The new land became known as Edom.

• *His many descendants*

Esau had thirteen grandsons mentioned in 36:9–14. Fourteen of Esau's descendants became chiefs of clans. They are mentioned in 35:15–19. There were sons and grandsons of Seir also living in the same land of Edom, mentioned in 36:20–28; one of them was famous for discovering hot springs in the wilderness ☞¹. Seven chiefs came from these people ☞². The Edomites had kings before there were any kings in Israel. Eight of them are mentioned in 36:31–39.

☞¹ 36:24
☞² 36:29–30

Why all this detail?

Eleven Edomite chiefs ruled eleven districts of Edom. What is the point of all of this detail given to us concerning Esau and his descendants?

1. *Even the non-elect Esau could be blessed by God*

2. *Even those not specially chosen can be blessed*

3. *God's chosen may go through tougher times but in the end will be blessed at a higher level*

Esau's blessings were nothing compared to those through Jacob's line – supremely through Jesus

1. It was an indication that **even the non-elect Esau could be blessed by God**. The choice of Jacob as God's channel for the line leading toward Jesus did not mean that Esau was rejected from every blessing altogether. We need to know that in the church of Jesus there are vessels chosen for honour. But among the saved even those not chosen to be famous or for special ministry can be blessed by God as well!

2. It was an indication that **God's blessings for those who are not chosen for special purposes can be quite similar to those for God's special channels of blessing**. Jacob was promised a seed; Esau had a seed as well. Jacob was Promised Land; Esau had land as well. Jacob was given the promise that kings would come from him; Esau had kings as well.



3. **God's chosen instruments go through a tougher time but their blessings are given at a higher level**. Esau had a seed as well as Jacob but that seed did not lead to Jesus. Esau had land as well as Jacob but that land would not lead to the new heavens and new earth. Actually for a long time Jacob's people lost the land and were taken to Egypt. The Promised Land for them would be the whole glorified earth given to all believers through Jesus. The promise is like the one given to Esau but is fulfilled at a higher level. Esau had kings as well as Jacob and they were given to him before they were given to Israel, but that line of kings did not lead to Jesus.

Those who are rejected by God for special use may have all of the earthly blessings that God's special instruments have, but eventually God uses His special instruments at a higher level.

It ought to let us know that when others seem to be doing better than we are, at an earthly level, our inheritance will come to us more slowly but it will be altogether greater. Esau got plenty of present blessings but the Edomites that were his descendants would have a tough time in the future. They would have hostile attitudes ^{¶1}. The Amalekites and Edomites were descended from Esau but would not experience the blessings of Jesus. Only through faith in Jesus is the history of Esau reversed. Any remaining descendants of Esau, whoever they might be, can find salvation in a son of Jacob, our Lord Jesus Christ. Esau had his own blessings but they were nothing compared to what would come to Jacob, God's chosen vessel living in the land of Canaan ^{¶2}.

¶1 see Numbers 20:21

¶2 37:1

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