

INTRODUCTION TO GENESIS CHAPTER 36

In this chapter we have an account of the posterity of Esau, who, from him, were called Edomites, that Esau who sold his birthright, and lost his blessing, and was not loved of God as Jacob was. Here is a brief register kept of his family for some generations.

1. Because he was the son of Isaac, for whose sake this honour is put upon him.
2. Because the Edomites were neighbours to Israel, and their genealogy would be of use to give light to the following stories of what passed between them.
3. It is to show the performance of the promise to Abraham, that he should be "the father of many nations," and of that answer which Rebekah had from the oracle she consulted, "Two nations are in thy womb," and of the blessing of Isaac, "Thy dwelling shall be the fatness of the earth."

We have here,

- I. Esau's wives, #Ge 36:1-5.
- II. His remove to mount Seir, #Ge 36:6-8.
- III. The names of his sons, #Ge 36:9-14.
- IV. The dukes who descended of his sons, #Ge 36:15-19.
- V. The dukes of the Horites, #Ge 36:20-30.
- VI. The kings and dukes of Edom, #Ge 36:31-43.

Little more is recorded than their names, because the history of those that were out of the church (though perhaps it might have been serviceable in politics) would have been of little use in divinity. It is in the church that the memorable instances are found of special grace, and special providence; for that is the enclosure, the rest is common. This chapter is abridged, #1Ch 1:35, &c.

Ver. 1.

Observe here,

1. Concerning Esau himself, #Ge 36:1. He is called *Edom* (and again, #Ge 36:8), that name by which was perpetuated the remembrance of the foolish bargain he made, when he sold his birthright for *that red, that red pottage*. The very mention of that name is enough to intimate the reason why his family is turned off with such a short account. Note, If men do a wrong thing they must thank themselves, when it is, long afterwards, remembered against them to their reproach.
2. Concerning his wives, and the children they bore him in the land of Canaan. He had three wives, and, by them all, but five sons: many a one has more by one wife. God in his providence often disappoints those who take indirect courses to build up a family; yet here the promise prevailed, and Esau's family was built up.
3. Concerning his removal to mount Seir, which was the country God had given him for a possession, when he reserved Canaan for the seed of Jacob. God owns it, long

afterwards: *I gave to Esau mount Seir* (#De 2:5; Jos 24:4), which was the reason why the Edomites must not be disturbed in their possession. Those that have not a right by promise, such as Jacob had, to Canaan, may have a very good title by providence to their estates, such as Esau had to mount Seir. Esau had begun to settle among his wives' relations, in Seir, before Jacob came from Padan-aram, #Ge 32:3. Isaac, it is likely, had sent him thither (as Abraham in his life-time had sent the sons of the concubines from Isaac his son into the east country, #Ge 25:6), that Jacob might have the clearer way made for him to the possession of the promised land. During the life of Isaac, however, Esau had probably still some effects remaining in Canaan; but, after his death, he wholly withdrew to mount Seir, took with him what came to his share of his father's personal estate, and left Canaan to Jacob, not only because he had the promise of it, but because Esau perceived that if they should continue to thrive as they had begun there would not be room for both. *Thus dwelt Esau in Mount Seir*, #Ge 36:8. Note, Whatever opposition may be made, God's word will be accomplished, and even those that have opposed it will see themselves, some time or other, under a necessity of yielding to it, and acquiescing in it. Esau had struggled for Canaan, but now he tamely retires to mount Seir; for God's counsels shall certainly stand, concerning the times before appointed, and the bounds of our habitation.

Ver. 9.

Observe here,

1. That only the names of Esau's sons and grandsons are recorded, only their names, not their history; for it is the church that Moses preserves the records of, not the record of those that are without. Those elders that lived by faith alone obtained a good report. It is Sion that produces men of renown, not Seir, #Ps 87:5. Nor does the genealogy go any further than the third and fourth generation; the very names of all after are buried in oblivion. It is only the pedigree of the Israelites, who were to be the heirs of Canaan, and of whom were to come the promised seed, and the holy seed, that is drawn out to any length, as far as there was occasion for it, even of all the tribes till Canaan was divided among them, and of the royal line till Christ came.
2. That these sons and grandsons of Esau are called *dukes*, #Ge 36:15-19. Probably they were military commanders, dukes, or captains, that had soldiers under them; for Esau and his family lived *by the sword*, #Ge 27:40. Note, Titles of honour have been more ancient out of the church than in it. Esau's sons were dukes when Jacob's sons were but plain shepherds, #Ge 47:3. This is not a reason why such titles should not be used among Christians; but it is a reason why men should not overvalue themselves, or others, for the sake of them. There is an honour that comes from God, and a name in his house that is infinitely more valuable. Edomites may be dukes with men, but Israelites indeed are made to our God kings and priests.
3. We may suppose those dukes had numerous families of children and servants that were their dukedoms. God promised to multiply Jacob, and to enrich him; yet Esau increases, and is enriched first. Note: It is no new thing for the men of this world to be full of children, and to have their bellies too *filled with hidden treasures*, #Ps 17:14. God's promise to Jacob began to work late, but the effect of it remained longer, and it had its complete accomplishment in the spiritual Israel.

Ver. 20.

In the midst of this genealogy of the Edomites here is inserted the genealogy of the Horites, those Canaanites, or Hittites (compare #Ge 26:34), that were the natives of Mount Seir. Mention is made of them, #Ge 14:6, and of their interest in Mount Seir, before the

Edomites took possession of it, **#De 2:12-22**. This comes in here, not only to give light to the story, but to be a standing reflection upon the Edomites for intermarrying with them, by which, it is probable, they learned their way, and corrupted themselves. Esau having sold his birthright, and lost his blessing, and entered into alliance with the Hittites, his posterity and the sons of Seir are here reckoned together. Note, Those that treacherously desert God's church are justly numbered with those that were never in it; apostate Edomites stand on the same ground with accursed Horites. Particular notice is taken of one Anah who fed the asses of Zibeon his father (**#Ge 36:24**), and yet is called *duke Anah*, **#Ge 36:29**. Note, Those that expect to rise high should begin low. An honourable descent should not keep men from an honest employment, nor a mean employment hinder any man's preferment. This Anah was not only industrious in his business, but ingenious too, and successful; for he found mules, or (as some read it) *waters, hot baths*, in the wilderness. Those that are diligent in their business sometimes find more advantages than they expected.

Ver. 31.

By degrees, it seems, the Edomites wormed out the Horites, obtained full possession of the country, and had a government of their own.

1. They were ruled by kings, who governed the whole country, and seem to have come to the throne by election, and not by lineal descent; so bishop Patrick observes. These kings reigned in *Edom before there reigned any king over the children of Israel*, that is, before Moses's time, for *he was king in Jeshurun*, **#Ge 36:3**. God had lately promised *Jacob that kings should come out of his loins* (**#Ge 35:11**), yet Esau's blood becomes royal long before any of Jacob's did. Note, In external prosperity and honour, the children of the covenant are often cast behind, and those that are out of covenant get the start. The triumphing of the wicked may be quick, but it is short; soon ripe, and as soon rotten: but the products of the promise, though they are slow, are sure and lasting; *at the end it shall speak, and not lie*. We may suppose it was a great trial to the faith of God's Israel to hear of the pomp and power of the kings of Edom, while they were bond slaves in Egypt; but those that look for great things from God must be content to wait for them; God's time is the best time.
2. They were afterwards governed by dukes, again here named, who, I suppose, ruled all at the same time in several places in the country. Either they set up this form of government in conformity to the Horites, who had used it (**#Ge 36:29**), or God's providence reduced them to it, as some conjecture, to correct them for their unkindness to Israel, in refusing them a passage though their country, **#Nu 20:18**. Note, When power is abused, it is just with God to weaken it, by turning it into divers channels. *For the transgression of a land, many are the princes thereof*. Sin brought Edom from kings to dukes, from crowns to coronets. We read of the dukes of Edom (**#Ex 15:15**), yet, long afterwards, of their kings again.
3. Mount Seir is called *the land of their possession*, **#Ge 36:43**. While the Israelites dwelt in the house of bondage, and their Canaan was only the land of promise, the Edomites dwelt in their own habitations, and Seir was in their possession. Note, The children of this world have their all in hand, and nothing in hope (**#Lu 16:25**); while the children of God have their all in hope, and next to nothing in hand. But, all things considered, it is better to have Canaan in promise than mount Seir in possession.