

## **History of Esau, Joseph Sold into Slavery Judah Goes to Live in Adullam**

*Genesis 36-38*

### **The Toledoth of Esau**

The word “toledoth,” as found in the original text, and also here most accurately translated by “history,” has been discussed in Outline 17, Part One, to which you are referred.

The many names have the structure of the people’s way of life as their framework. The order is as follows:

- a. The names of Esau’s three pagan wives and of his five sons born in Canaan (36:1-5);
- b. Esau, who was a nomad, departed with all that he possessed from his brother Jacob to another land—the hill country of Seir, in which he had been living when Jacob entered Canaan. This permanent departure is almost certainly to be dated after the death of his father Isaac, when he and his brother Jacob had buried their father at Machpelah. His motive was, as Scripture reveals, that there was not enough room for their combined possessions (36:6-8);
- c. The list of the sons and grandsons in Seir (36:9-14);
- d. The list of the first *tribal chiefs*—and then we are much further in the history of Esau already, the point at which the first organization of the tribes took place (36:15-19);
- e. The list of tribal chiefs of the original inhabitants, the *Horites*, having descended from Seir already before the time of Abraham, later largely destroyed by Chedorlaomer (Genesis 14:6), and after the expansion of Edom again attacked, and exterminated or driven out by the people descended from Esau [Deuteronomy 2:12, 22] (36:20-30);
- f. Of much later date the *list of kings*, eight names of kings, each from

a different place, who ruled before any king (Saul) reigned over the Israelites (36:31-39);

g. A concluding list of tribal chiefs, geographically arranged (“according to... their dwelling places”), dating, perhaps, from the time of David, at which time the kingship, as an independent institution, had come to an end; in the time of the Greeks and Romans, the remnant was included with Judah, inhabiting the south of the land (Idumea); after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., it was assimilated by the surrounding nations.

It is worthy of note that in this chapter Esau, five times, is called Edom, or father of the Edomites, a name which reminds us of the rejection of his birthright for a bowl of red broth, and which later consistently reveals enmity towards Israel.

Esau chose that which was temporal, and received it, according to his nature; Edom, the nation with its rough life of hunting and warfare, inhabiting the wild mountain regions and the arid surrounding deserts (cf. the prophecy of Obadiah; Isaiah 34; Jeremiah 49:7-22). “I have hated Esau” (Malachi 1:3).

### **The Toledoth of Jacob**

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It is remarkable that the history of Jacob begins only in 37:2, after he had received a large family and possessed large herds. That which has been related concerning Jacob is still part of the history of Isaac. Outline 17, Part One, has pointed out that we are not reading the story of a person (biography), but the *history of salvation*. With Jacob and his family, Isaac was *the seed of Abraham*, recipient of the Abrahamic blessing; Scripture shows that Isaac truly was the seed, even manifold seed.

### **Joseph in Slavery**

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The “history of Jacob” begins with a description of the idyllic life of the seventeen-year-old Joseph, a boy tending the herds in the fields near Bethel, where the camp had been set up. Rachel was still alive.

It is remarkable that Jacob entrusted his then-youngest son to the sons of *Bilhah and Zilpah*, not to the sons of *Leah*; it is most likely that the warped

relationships in Jacob's family, which will also have influenced the children, could have led to difficulties; it may also be that the four sons of the two concubines stayed closer to home.

A second feature is that Joseph, portrayed as a pious lad, brought an ill report, that he had heard concerning the four, to his father.

A third fact is that his father loved him more than any of the others, because he was the son of his old age; and showed this by the gift of a beautiful coat—a reason for such hatred that none of his brothers could even greet him politely.

When, in the spring, the grain was being reaped (for, like Isaac, Jacob grew crops as well as raised cattle), Joseph told his brothers that he had dreamed: their sheaves bowed down to his; which caused their hatred to flare up—they understood what he was trying to say. When the time of harvest was over, and they were all back in camp, he told his brothers, and also his father, that he had now dreamed that the sun, the moon, and eleven stars bowed down to him. This caused jealousy to be added to the already-present hatred, and even his father rebuked him, "What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come and bow ourselves down to the ground before you?" It is obvious that this dream was intended to fit the situation as it existed: Rachel was still alive, and eleven sons had been born, for Benjamin had yet to be born. The dream will have been meant to indicate Jacob's whole family without showing who would still be alive when the fulfilment came. How strong the irritation provoked by the dream was, is shown by their mocking remarks at Dothan, "Here comes this dreamer" (37:19). Joseph remembered it in Egypt when his brothers bowed down before him (42:9); and Jacob also kept the dream in mind.

We must see *these dreams as revelations* given by God, of great importance to Joseph himself, for they would comfort him when, two years later, he would be carried to Egypt and oppressed there—let us not forget that there he was bereft of prophecy, thus having to bear all his troubles alone. Why did he pass these dreams on? It could have been youthful naively. Scripture is silent about it. Why did he receive those dreams now already?

Scripture does not say anything about this either. However, in retrospect, it is remarkable that these dreams were the very reason that his brothers sold him into Egypt. We may note that God, in His providence, decided to use these dreams as the cause of Joseph's going into Egypt, to the end that the church—Jacob's generations—would be saved; although this does not excuse the brothers' despisal of God's prophecy and the rejection of His prophet. We can see God's wonderful guidance; "Yes, in the person Joseph, Christ's living image is demonstrated" (Calvin)—already in his early years.

The growing tension is resolved in the dramatic occurrence at *Dothan*. Jacob had moved away from Bethel towards *Hebron*.

About two years after the dreams, the brothers, with their flocks, moved to *Shechem*, about 80 or 90 km north of Hebron. Shepherds often went far away from home. On a certain day, Jacob asked Joseph, who had stayed at home, to find his brothers and to enquire after their welfare; and Joseph obeyed.

Wandering around Shechem, Joseph met a man who, when asked, told Joseph that he had heard them say, "Let us go to Dothan" (some distance to the north).

From afar they saw him coming, and with sarcasm the words sounded: "Here comes this dreamer." Did those dreams ever bother them! The plan was conceived to murder him, to throw his body into one of the pits, and then to tell their father that a wild beast had devoured him. Then they would see what would become of his dreams. That this didn't happen was due to the intervention of *Reuben*, the oldest one, who managed to convince them just to throw him into a dry pit. Reuben intended to rescue him later, and send him back to his father.

So it happened: they took off Joseph's beautiful coat and cast him into the pit and leaving him there to starve, they sat down to eat their meal.

However, by God's providence, an unexpected turn of events befell them. In the distance, a caravan of Ishmaelite merchants approached along the

road which led past the pit; this gave *Judah* the idea not to let Joseph die, but to sell him. The idea was accepted. But then a *Midianite* company came by from the other direction, came to the pit first, discovered Joseph, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for a price even lower than that of a slave. Joseph's brothers stood by, without intervening. They apparently approved. They felt that now they could wash their hands in innocence. Thus Joseph was taken to the Ishmaelites' destination.

*Reuben*, who wasn't present, came back to rescue Joseph from the pit, but found him gone! In despair he cried, "The lad is gone, and I, where shall I go?"

In hypocrisy, the others sent their father the many-coloured coat, dipped in the blood of a ram, to let him believe that a wild beast had devoured Joseph; and, coming home, they tried to comfort the greatly grieved Jacob in a mass visit.

In the meantime, Joseph had been sold by the *Midianites* to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's courtiers, the captain of the guard.

Joseph had been given up and passed from one hand to the next: the brothers, the Midianites, the Ishmaelites, they were all guilty. Through the actions of his own people, Joseph was bound by strangers and carried away.

A fine lot, these brothers, the church of those days, that cast out one of their own; but through God's providence, they *had* to work out their own salvation.

### **Judah in Adullam**

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Almost certainly after Joseph had been carried away, Judah withdrew himself from his father's camp at Hebron, and settled in the old royal city *Adullam*, in the Judean hill country to the west. He went to live with a certain Hirah, with whom he had been friends for many years. Scripture does not elaborate on his motives; it just gives us the bare fact that one of Jacob's sons withdrew himself from the communion of his family, and, as such, from the church and the service of God at the altar, and

went to live with a Canaanite. In this we can again see the influence of Canaanitism.

He found a wife there, *Shua*, who, when he married her, bore him three sons: *Er, Onan, and Shelah*. The deplorable condition of his marriage may be deduced from the fact that he was at *Chezib* (in the same hill country, a few kilometres away from Adullum), at the time of Shelah's birth.

When *Er* reached marriageable age, Judah gave him *Tamar*, also a Canaanitess, to wife, but shortly after the wedding God killed him because of his sinful life. Now she became *Onan's* wife at Judah's command, but, because Onan knew that any son would be considered Er's, he purposely spilled his semen on the ground whenever he had intercourse with her, thus wasting it. This was evil in the sight of the Lord, so that He killed Onan also.

Driven by the superstitious fear that it was Tamar's fault that both his sons had died, Judah pretended that his third son was too young to marry her, and he sent her to live with her father as a widow.

When many days had passed, about a year or a year and a half, Shua, Judah's wife, died. After the time of mourning was over, Judah and his friend, Hirah the Adullamite, went to the sheep-shearers in *Timnah*, also in the hill country. Tamar, who had heard it, and who felt deceived because her situation was being neglected, thought up a trick. Disguised as a cult prostitute, her face covered by a veil, she sat down in the gate of the small town Enaim, through which Judah and Hirah would pass on their way to the shearing feast at Timnah.

The cunning stratagem was successful. Judah, seeing her and thinking her to be a whore, came to her, and for the price of a young goat went in to her; then she removed her disguise, donned her widow's garments, and disappeared. She was bright enough, however, to demand a pledge, to be sure that Judah would bring her the kid. The pledge was his signet ring, the cord on which it was hung, and his staff, apparently distinctively marked. A short time later, Judah sent the promised kid by the hand of his friend Hirah, who also had to bring the pledge back, but upon investigating

where the cult prostitute, who had been seated by the roadside, had gone, he heard that no cult prostitute had been there! He had to return with the disappointing news to Judah, who decided not to pursue the matter any further, to avoid making of himself and Hirah a laughing-stock.

However, three months later Judah was informed that his daughter-in-law was pregnant, by harlotry, which was punishable by death if the woman was meant for another. Judah sentenced her harshly, saying that she would be brought out to be burned.

When the time of her punishment had come—that is how long she waited—she sent the pledge back to her father-in-law with the message that she was with child by the man to whom the pledge belonged. In this way she made it a public matter, that all might know that the man who had condemned her was himself the father. Judah now remembered what he had promised her and admitted that she was in the right. Through the discovery of ancient laws we know that justice demanded that, if there were no brother-in-law for the childless widow, the father-in-law had to beget a son for the deceased; and because Shelah, the third son, had been kept from her by Judah, Judah *had* to take this duty upon himself. Tamar, of course, had made it known so that public opinion would give her justice. Judah now also admitted that. After this he did not have intercourse with her again, and from what follows we may conclude that he returned to the camp at Hebron with his Canaanite “wife.”

When her term was up, Tamar brought forth a set of twins. When one of the children put out a hand, the midwife bound a scarlet thread around it to indicate that this was the first-born; but he pulled in his hand, and his brother was born. For this reason his brother was called *Perez*, that is “breach,” with which the midwife meant to say, “What a breach, a breaking through, you have made for yourself! How you have pushed yourself ahead!” The other child was called *Zerah*, a play of words on the scarlet thread around his wrist.

This happened during the time that Joseph had been sent to Egypt, a time of terrible deformation of the Church. The difference herein lies in the nature of the facts: *the casting out of Joseph typifies the enmity towards the*

*revealed Word in the dreams and towards the prophet.* This suggests the people as they later killed the prophets for administering the Word; and even as they cast out the Son of God by hanging Him on the cross, although this occurred at the hand of strangers. The particular significance of Chapter 38 is that it shows *the church in her hankering for the world, through which she is in danger of falling back into heathendom.* Through this window we see the church of the Old and New Testament in idolatry and secularization, by which many of her children fall into unchastity and adultery, drinking the cup of unbridled sensuality unto death.

But *God's grace* has been shown. Judah is once again united with his people. Judah, later proclaimed by the dying Jacob to be the royal tribe, would bring forth David; and from David the Christ, David's seed, would be begotten of the Holy Spirit in Mary's womb, and be born holy, in order that He would carry and expiate the guilt of His ancestors and of all His people.

Wonderful are God's ways.

### **Questions**

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1. Do you know an Idumean royal family?
2. (36:7) Why is Canaan also called the land of Esau's sojournings?
3. (37:2) When Joseph brought an ill report, was that to do good or was he wrong? Does this teach us anything? To what degree?
4. (37:3, 4) Was Jacob wise to act in this way?
5. (37:1-11) What was God's intention in guiding Joseph's life in this way?
6. (37:1-11) What shows us that in Joseph the living image of Christ is demonstrated?

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7. (37:28) Does this not contradict Joseph's statement (45:4) that his brothers had sold him, and the statement in 37:36 that the Midianites did it?
  8. (37:28) Was Christ also delivered up through strangers?
  9. Did Tamar ask for a pledge because of the kid, or was this just an excuse?
  10. Is there any similarity between the births of Perez and Zerah and those of Jacob and Esau? Or is there rather a difference?
  11. That God chose this peculiar way to come to the incarnation of the Word—what does this teach us?