

Jacob and His Sons (Gen. 34-50)

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The focus now shifts to Jacob and his sons. Almost immediately we are shown the sons trying to take vengeance upon a man who took advantage of their sister, Dinah (34). In the process, they were guilty of deceit and were charged, by Jacob, with bringing trouble upon him.

Jacob moved to Bethel, where God had previously appeared to him. He built an altar there, and God reaffirmed that Jacob's name would be *Israel* (meaning "God strives"). God further reaffirmed the promises made to Abraham. Interestingly, God told Jacob to be fruitful and multiply (sound familiar?), and that a nation, nations, and kings would come from him. He would also be given the land, as promised to Abraham and Isaac. In other words, the land, nation, and seed promise would continue through Israel and his offspring.

Rachel, Jacob's favorite wife, had two sons. The first was Joseph, and the second Benjamin. After she gave birth to Benjamin, she passed away. Yet because Joseph was the oldest of Jacob's favorite, he would receive special treatment.

At this point, the text reminds us that even though Esau was not the one chosen to receive the promises, he would still have many children (36). The significance of



Esau's descendants is found in the fact that they would later have an impact on Israel as a nation. This nation that came from Esau become known as the Edomites, and their land possession was situated south of Israel, just below the Dead Sea.

The Edomites and Israelites would become longstanding enemies of one another, thus fulfilling the statement to Rebekah, that two nations were in her womb, and one would be stronger than the other (Gen. 25:23).

From Genesis 37, the main narrative focus is on Joseph, again Jacob's favorite of his twelve sons. Joseph generally was a remarkable young man, and a fine example to all who desire to live godly. He demonstrated great faithfulness to God in very difficult circumstances, as the rest of Genesis shows (Genesis 37-50).

Because he was his father's favorite, the brothers would do terrible things to Joseph. One of the signs of Jacob's love for Joseph was that he made him a special tunic to wear. This tunic likely indicated that he was not expected to work out in the fields, and it distinguished him well from the others. Jacob's love for Joseph over the other sons created many problems (as such favoritism often does). His brothers "hated him and could not speak to him on friendly terms" (37:4).

To make matters worse, Joseph told his brothers of dreams he had, indicating that they would bow down to him one day. Joseph came out to the field to check on his brothers, and they plotted to destroy him. At first, they wanted to kill him, but decided rather to throw him in a pit. When some Ishmaelite traders came through, his brothers sold him to them, and they took him down to Egypt where he would become a servant. The brothers took Joseph's coat, dipped it in blood, and gave it to Jacob so that he would think his son was dead. This brought Jacob great grief. The rest of Joseph's life would be lived in Egypt, but it would all become a part of God's greater plans.

One of the breaks in the story of Joseph is a narrative that focuses on Judah (38). The text records the sin of Judah, showing his indiscretions. Why is this here? Likely because by the end of the chapter, one of the sons born to Judah was named Perez (38:29). Perez would be the one through whom the seed promise would be fulfilled, as he is in the lineage of Christ (Matt. 1:3).

In spite of the difficulties faced, God was with Joseph, and everything he did prospered. Joseph showed himself to be a man of great integrity. He rose to a high position in the household of Potiphar, a captain in the Egyptian army. When he was thrown in jail under false accusations of Potiphar's wife, he became a supervisor under the chief jailer. After a time, the cupbearer and baker for the Pharaoh were thrown in jail, and Joseph was able to interpret dreams that they had. Because of this, after a couple more years, he was given an opportunity to interpret a dream for Pharaoh himself. In this, he foretold of a famine that would come. Pharaoh then put Joseph in charge of storing up enough food

to take care of the period of famine. Joseph's rise to power in Egypt set up the situation that would allow God's plan to flourish.

The famine, which spread into Palestine, led to Joseph's brothers coming down to Egypt. They did, in fact, bow down to Joseph. Yet Joseph had no desire to exact vengeance. Rather, he treated them kindly. Eventually, Joseph's family, including his father Jacob, all moved down to Egypt where they would grow into a great nation of people over many years. All of this was made possible because of Joseph and God's working through him. Before Joseph died, he asked his family to bring his bones back to Palestine, where he knew the promises of God would be fulfilled.

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