

“The Sons of Isaac and Their Seed”
(Genesis 35:16-36:43)

As we have been going through the book of Genesis, we have noticed a recurring theme: separation. God doesn't want His covenant people, the people to whom He made His promise, to live with the people outside the covenant. To put it in other terms, there is a city of God and there is a city of man, and the Lord doesn't want the two to mix. If they did, His people would be polluted with their gods and their immoral practices. This is why the Lord separated Adam and Eve from Cain, why He kept Noah separate from the people of the earth, why the Lord removed Abraham from his people, why He made sure that Isaac remained separate and that he got a wife from his father's relatives. This is why Jacob could not marry a Canaanite woman, but had to go to Paddan-aram to get a wife, why Jacob could not stay with Laban, but had to return to the land of Promise, why the Lord didn't allow Jacob and his family to intermarry with Shechem and his family, and why the Lord revived Jacob's household and separated them from their idols before He renewed the covenant with them. As long as they were in the world, the danger of pollution was always there, and the Lord wanted His people to remain pure. His purpose is still the same for us today. He does not want us to be unequally yoked and bound together with unbelievers, if it is in our power to do so. He wants us to remain separate, so that we will not learn and follow in the world's ways, but in His.

This evening, we're going to see one more separation – the final separation between Jacob and his seed and Esau and his seed. The covenant even makes separations take place within the covenant community itself. Even though Esau was in the line of Abraham, and therefore was a part of the fulfillment of the promise that Abraham would be the father of many nations, yet he had no part in the covenant. God had rejected him (Rom. 9:13). He was the enemy of Jacob. His children would also be the enemies of Jacob's children. He was of the kingdom of the evil one, while Jacob was of the kingdom of God. Once Isaac was dead – the only remaining thing that bound them together – it was time for them to go their separate ways. What we'll look at are two things: 1) First, the generations of Jacob's seed, and 2) second, the generations of Esau's seed and their final separation.

First we see the generations of Jacob's seed, or the listing of his children (35:16-29). The first thing we read of is the birth of the final son of Jacob. After they left Bethel, while they were still a long way from Ephrath, which is Bethlehem, Rachel began to suffer severe labor, which meant that there was something wrong. Certainly this was the case, because she died soon after the child was born. As we saw earlier, this might have been because of the curse Jacob pronounced. That person who had Laban's idols would not live (Gen. 31:32). The idols weren't found, but the Lord knew where they were, and He tends to honor the words of the heads of households, especially when they happen to be the bearers of His promise. Now just before Rachel's soul departed from her body – as the Lord tells us in other parts of Scripture is the case at death, since our souls and bodies are separate things: our souls either go to be with the Lord if we are Christians, or to hell if we are not, and our bodies return to the earth – just before her departure, she named her second son Ben-oni – which means the son of my sorrow. She

had once pled with Jacob to give her children or she would die (Gen. 30:1). She finally had two sons, but in giving birth to the second, it cost her her life, and so she gave him this name. But Jacob didn't want the boy's name to remind him of the death of his beloved wife, and so he named him Benjamin – which means the son of my right hand – the right hand being the place of honor. When we see what happens later to the tribe of Benjamin, and that Saul, the first king of Israel was a Benjamite, we might tend to agree with the name Rachel gave him. Benjamin troubled his brothers. This might also be seen in the blessing that Jacob later gives Benjamin in Genesis 49:27. He said, “Benjamin is a ravenous wolf; in the morning he devours the prey, and in the evening he divides the spoil.

After this, Rachel died, and Jacob buried her on the way to Ephrath, and set up a pillar over her grave as a memorial. Another thing that is interesting to note is that the pain and weeping that she experienced in child birth, as well as the place that she died was also providentially arranged by the Lord to foreshadow something in the life of His coming Son Jesus. It would be in Bethlehem that Jesus would be born, and also in Bethlehem that King Herod would slaughter all the male children two years old and younger. This would be in fulfillment of the Word of the Lord through Jeremiah the prophet, “Thus says the Lord, ‘A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation *and* bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more’” (Jer. 31:15). Ramah is about 5 miles north of Jerusalem, which is probably the area where Rachel died. It may be that she is represented as weeping for her children, because the tribe of Benjamin was eventually absorbed into the tribe of Judah, which is where Bethlehem is located (See 1 Kings 11:31 where ten tribes are given to Jeroboam, while two remain to Rehoboam – Judah and Benjamin). It was in Bethlehem that the children would be slaughtered. But in any case, Benjamin was born. The final son had arrived. Now Jacob had twelve sons, the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel. We see them listed out in verses 22-26. God had been gracious to Jacob as He said He would and had fulfilled His promise to him: His children were already becoming numerous. It's always encouraging and comforting to see the faithfulness of the Lord in His Word, because this is the same faithfulness with which He fulfills His promises to us. His promise to us is as sure as if it had already taken place.

After this, we read that he journeyed on beyond the tower of Eder. While they were there, Reuben, Jacob's first-born, incestuously violated his father's concubine, Bilhah, Rachel's maid, and the mother of Dan and Naphtali. Now Jacob heard, but didn't do anything about it, at least not then. When it would come time for Jacob to bless his sons before he dies, then he would bring retribution on him: he would take away his right of first-born. We read in Genesis 49:3-4, “Reuben, you are my first-born; my might and the beginning of my strength, preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power. Uncontrolled as water, you shall not have preeminence, because you went up to your father's bed; then you defiled *it*-- he went up to my couch.” This again shows us that you can separate God's covenant people from the world, but that doesn't necessarily separate the world from their hearts. The Lord tells us to watch over our hearts diligently, because they direct our lives (Prov. 4:23), and when they are full of sin, they lead us into sin, sometimes even great sin.

Finally, Jacob came to his father Isaac at Mamre in Hebron, the same place where Abraham had earlier sojourned. And it was here that his father died, full of days, as the

Hebrew says, at the age of 180, and he was gathered to his people. A long life is generally a sign of God's blessing (Deu. 30:20; Ps. 34:12), although sometimes the Lord takes His people out of the world earlier, if that is what He has planned to glorify His name through them. But after he died, Jacob and Esau bury him. This is probably the last time that they see each other in their lifetimes.

And so we have seen the generations, or the children, of Jacob. Second, let's look at the generations, or the children, of Esau, and Esau's final separation from Jacob (Gen. 36:1-43). We mustn't forget that Esau and his children were also a part of the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise. The Lord said that many nations and kings would come forth from Abraham's loins. Edom was one of those nations, which as we see, had many kings. Now all of these names listed here weren't Esau's descendants. From verse 20-30, we read about the original inhabitants of Seir, the place where Esau settled. It was also from these people that Esau would get his wife Oholibamah. Oholibamah was a Horite. The Horites were a branch of the Hivites – the same tribe from which Hamor and Shechem descended – who are also thought to be a branch of the Hittites, or one of the tribes of Canaan. We also read in verses 31-39 of the kings who reigned in Edom before there was any king in Israel. And then we read about the chiefs or leaders who came from Esau's line in verses 40-43. Apparently Esau not only married into their family, but also eventually took over their land. We read in Deuteronomy 2:12, "The Horites formerly lived in Seir, but the sons of Esau dispossessed them and destroyed them from before them and settled in their place, just as Israel did to the land of their possession which the Lord gave to them." These are the generations of Esau.

But the Lord had not chosen this line of Abraham's descendants from which to bring forth His Messiah, or to give the blessings of redemption. And so we read that after Isaac died, and the possessions of both men became too great for the land to sustain them both, Esau moved to the hill country of Seir, because this was the land which the Lord had chosen to give to him (Deu. 2:5). Esau was already separated from the people of God through the promise – he was not to inherit it. Now he is separated physically, by God's providential dealing, so that he and his family don't become a threat to God's covenant people.

Of course, the Lord will continue to narrow the line to Judah, then to David, and finally to Christ. And within this line there will continue to be the narrowing which takes place through faith, for it's only those who have faith who will inherit the promises. But finally, after the time of Christ, it will open up and expand to the Gentiles, to all whom the Lord will give this same faith of Abraham – just as He has to us. But we mustn't forget that holiness is still important to the work of God. We must continue to keep ourselves separate from the world and separate from sin, if we are to be a part of His plan. May the Lord teach us the lesson of holiness, and by His Spirit grant that we might be a holy people. Amen.