

Genesis 36 wraps up the account of Esau, who was passed over by God for Jacob as the heir of promise. The chapter can be divided into five sections: 1-8, 9-19, 20-30, 31-39 and 40-43. Although on the surface the wrap-up follows the pattern of Genesis, there is more here than is needed for that. Esau became the father of the Edomites who would have a continuing role in relation to Israel (*cf.* vv 1, 8, 9, 16, 19, 31, 32, 43).

A real question for the Israelites of the Exodus, the probably first readers of this account, would concern the reason for God prospering Esau. And it would continue to be a question for Israel. They would hinder the exodus, but Israel was not to harm them but rather pay for any food and water they needed from them (Numbers 20; Deuteronomy 2). They were brothers. On the basis of this chapter, what can be said about God's action of blessing Esau?

I. *God blessed to fulfill His word to the patriarchs.*

1. *God's word to Abraham – kings and nations would come from him.* See Genesis 17:4-6. Although this promise began to be fulfilled in Ishmael, in Esau we see it more completely, both that nations would come from Abraham and kings.
2. *God's word to Rebekah (and Isaac) – a nation would come from Esau.* To Rebekah during her pregnancy God had announced that two nations and two peoples would come from the twins within her (Genesis 25:23).
3. *God's word through Isaac – Esau's dwelling would be away from the earth's richness.* Isaac could not give a blessing to Esau which he had already given away to Jacob. Instead he said that Esau's dwelling would be away from the earth's richness. Esau would serve his brother, but later throw off his yoke (Gen 27:39-40). For some reason Esau had established a home in the region around Mt. Seir (Gen 32:3). When their possessions grew too great, Esau withdrew from Jacob to that isolated, somewhat barren region.

We are reminded that God keeps His word. What has been fulfilled gives assurance that all will be fulfilled.

II. *God blessed despite Esau's character and action.*

1. Two particular points are brought to mind: (1) Esau leaving Canaan for Seir remind us that Esau had despised his birthright. (2) Esau had disregarded the desires and pattern of his parents and ancestors by marrying Canaanite women. The spiritual influence of Canaanite religion was particularly dangerous. Note: the difference in names between this chapter and 26:34 and 28:9 may be due to an ancient custom of giving new names to women when they married. Similarly, Anah may have received the name "Beer", "spring man", when he located the hot springs in the desert.
2. Evidence of God's blessing is no guarantee of the righteousness of the one blessed. Esau was not blessed because of his right character or actions.

We are similarly warned that God's blessing is not a mark of God's approval. Even the Psalmist would ask, "Why do the wicked prosper?" That it goes well or not is by God's sovereign choice. God often showed his grace upon the tribe of Judah and their kings because of King David. A nation or a city might be blessed because of a few righteous in it. Our standard to measure if our actions are pleasing to God is the Word of God and not our circumstantial well-being.

III. *God blessed through Esau's actions.*

1. Esau withdrew from the land which God had promised to Isaac and his descendants thereby making it less complicated 4 centuries later for Israel to take the land.
2. We do not know what reasons Esau had for this action. We do know that God uses others and the circumstances around us to accomplish His will, as He did in the OT and NT with pagan kings and governments.

We should appreciate God's hand behind the actions of those around us, who acts according to his good purposes for our eternal well-being. It should give us a sense of peace, wonder and thanksgiving.

IV. *God blessed despite the future actions of Edom.*

The future Edom would act in evil ways toward Israel but that did not deter God from blessing Esau at this time.

Edom would not let Israel pass by the main highway through their country as they came out of Egypt. It came to all-out war between Israel and the Edomites under King Saul and continued under King David and future kings. Edom rejoiced at the fall of Jerusalem. Amos and Obadiah record God's judgment on Edom because they turned with the sword against their brother.

God's knowledge of this did not stop Him from prospering Esau and making a great nation from him.

God's reason for prospering Esau and making a great nation of him is simply, though probably unsatisfactory to many. God blessed because He chose to bless. God is gracious.

None of us earn the blessing of God. All that we have earned is eternal separation from God (Rom 6:23). The prosperity of Esau is a reason to praise God that He keeps His word and blesses out of His own good grace.