

Genesis 36:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And these are the sons of Reuel Esau's son; duke Nahath, duke Zerah, duke Shammah, duke Mizzah: these are the dukes that came of Reuel in the land of Edom; these are the sons of Bashemath Esau's wife.

Analysis

And these are the sons of Reuel Esau's son; duke Nahath, duke Zerah, duke Shammah, duke Mizzah: thes... This passage belongs to the Jacob narratives which demonstrate God's sovereign election overriding human merit and the transformation of a deceiver into Israel, the father of the twelve tribes. The Jacob cycle shows how divine purposes advance through flawed individuals whom God graciously transforms.

Key themes include God's sovereign choice ("the older shall serve the younger"), the consequences of deception and family dysfunction, exile and return patterns, wrestling with God leading to blessing, and covenant renewal across generations. Jacob's character development from manipulative deceiver to mature patriarch demonstrates sanctification's lifelong process.

Theologically significant aspects include:

1. divine election based on grace not merit (Romans 9:10-13)
2. God's faithfulness to covenant promises despite human unfaithfulness
3. discipline as evidence of divine love and means of transformation
4. generational patterns of sin requiring divine intervention to break
5. prayer and wrestling with God as legitimate expressions of faith.

Jacob's limp after wrestling God symbolizes how divine encounters leave permanent marks, transforming our approach to life and dependence on God rather than our own cunning.

Historical Context

The patriarchal narratives (Genesis 12-50) reflect the cultural, social, and legal customs of the ancient Near East during the Middle Bronze Age (2000-1500 BCE). Archaeological discoveries including the Mari tablets, Nuzi tablets, and Egyptian records confirm many details: nomadic pastoralism, covenant-making ceremonies, marriage customs, property laws, and international travel patterns described in Genesis.

The cultural practices reflected include: treaty/covenant forms (Genesis 15), bride-price customs (Genesis 24, 29), inheritance laws favoring firstborn sons (Genesis 25, 27), adoption practices (Genesis 15, 30), levirate-type arrangements (Genesis 38), and Egyptian administrative systems (Genesis 41, 47). These parallels confirm Genesis's historical reliability while showing how God worked within ancient cultural frameworks to accomplish His purposes.

For later Israelites, these narratives established their identity as Abraham's descendants, explained their claim to Canaan, justified their possession of Joseph's bones (Exodus 13:19), and provided models of faith despite imperfection. The patriarchs' failures and God's faithfulness encouraged Israel that covenant relationship depended on God's grace rather than human merit. The movement from Mesopotamia to Canaan to Egypt set the stage for the Exodus and conquest narratives.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. What theological truths about Esau's Descendants emerge from this passage?
2. What obstacles prevent us from living out the truths presented in this verse?
3. How does this passage point forward to Christ and the gospel of redemption?

Interlinear Text

וְאֵלֶּה	בְּנֵי י	רְעוּאֵל	בְּנֵי י	עֵשָׂו:			
H428	And these are the sons	of Reuel	And these are the sons	Esau's			
	H1121	H7467	H1121	H6215			
אֶלּוּפִי י	נָחַת	אֶלּוּפִי י	זֶרַח	אֶלּוּפִי י	שַׁמָּה	אֶלּוּפִי י	מִיִּזָּח
duke	Nahath	duke	Zerah	duke	Shammah	duke	Mizzah
H441	H5184	H441	H2226	H441	H8048	H441	H4199
וְאֵלֶּה	אֶלּוּפִי י	רְעוּאֵל	בְּאֶרֶץ	אֶדֹם	וְאֵלֶּה		
H428	duke	of Reuel	in the land	of Edom	H428		
	H441	H7467	H776	H123			
	בְּנֵי י	בַּשֶּׁמֶת	אִשְׁתּוֹ	עֵשָׂו:			
And these are the sons	of Bashemath	wife	Esau's				
H1121	H1315	H802	H6215				

Additional Cross-References

1 Chronicles 1:37 (Parallel theme): The sons of Reuel; Nahath, Zerah, Shammah, and Mizzah.

Genesis 36:13 (Parallel theme): And these are the sons of Reuel; Nahath, and Zerah, Shammah, and Mizzah: these were the sons of Bashemath Esau's wife.