



**Genesis 36-41:
the records of Esau and Jacob**

by Bernard Gabbott

Memory verse:

"I am not able to," Joseph answered Pharaoh.
"It is God who will give Pharaoh a favorable answer."

Genesis 41:16

Introduction

The account of Genesis lays down so many of the foundation stones for the rest of God's word. The opening twelve chapters lay out the basics: who made the world, how the world was made, how the world was to operate, who broke the world, the devastating cycle of sin and judgement interspersed with grace, and the commitment of God to his broken world so that the curse would be reversed. With the commitment to Abraham and his family (Genesis 12:1-3), the account of Genesis moves into the clear 'toledot' formula and structure—actually, this was already evident from Genesis 2. Each time, we are given the 'family account' of a key character. Each time we are shown the grace of God—his undeserved mercy to this family, and through them to the world. Each time we see the reality of sin, the goodness of mercy from God, and the overall unfolding of the plans and purposes of God.

This time, we deal with the family records of Esau (ch.36), and then the family records of Jacob (from ch.37 on). Here is the grace-filled even-handed nature of God's word. Esau might not have received the covenant passed down from Abraham to Isaac, and now to Jacob. But he remains a child of God's promise (remember the way God dealt with Ishmael in Genesis 16? And Isaac's blessing of Esau in Genesis 27:38-40?), and the fullness of the grace of God is seen in his family history.

The promise of God—by grace alone—has passed to Jacob: through his family God will achieve what he promised in Genesis 12. And so we meet his sons, and watch the dysfunctionality of this family tree blossom again—and so, too, the promised grace of God!

Study 1: Genesis 36

Comprehend

1. Read Genesis 36.
2. What are your initial thoughts?
3. Whose family record is this? (vs.1)

What do we learn about the origin of this family? (vs.2-5)

4. What do we learn about this family, vis-à-vis Jacob's family? (vs.6-8)
5. Read through the family tree—is there any discernible pattern or rhythm—why/why not? And what might this mean?

Consider

1. How did Esau deal with the grace that God extended to him?
2. How did Esau walk away from the land of God's promise?
3. With twelve tribes, how might we see a contrast here between Esau's greatness, and the greatness of Jacob's line to come?

Contact

1. What do we learn here about God's grace and human life?

2. What do we learn here about human willfulness and God's judgement?

3. What do we learn here about the promises of God?

Study 2: Genesis 37

Comprehend

1. Read Genesis 37.
2. Whose 'family record' is this, and where are we? (vs.1)
3. Who do we meet straight away—and why is this important? (vs.2) (cf. 30:22-24)

What else do we learn, especially about family relationships... and what do you think this bodes? (vs.3-4)

4. In vs.5-11, we have Joseph's dream sequence. What does this reveal, and create?
5. In vs.12-17, Joseph is given a task—what is it?
6. In vs.18-31, what do Joseph's brother decide and then achieve?

What are the nuances we see here?

7. How is the news broken to Jacob? And how does he respond? (vs.32-35)

What happens to Joseph? (vs.35)

Consider

1. How is Genesis 37 the logical outcome of Genesis 29:31-30:24?
2. What is revealed about the functionality of the chosen line of God?

What is the only hope in this episode?

3. How does the closing verse start to show the fulfilment of Genesis 15:13-14?

Contact

1. What is comforting about this opening to Jacob's 'family history'?
2. What is confronting?
3. How do we see the character of God here, and the nature of humanity?
4. How does this bear out the importance of Genesis 12:1-3?

Study 3: Genesis 38

Comprehend

1. Read Genesis 38.
2. We have met Judah a little—his development as a man within God's mob tracks alongside that of Joseph. Already he has shown some leadership quality (37:26-27). Now we look at his life in greater depth. What do we learn? (vs.1-5)
3. What do we learn about Judah's family? (vs.6-10)

How does Judah handle this? (vs.11)

How is this situation 'described', as the event of years down the track are revealed? (vs.12-15)

4. What transpires? (vs.16-19)
5. What is revealed? (vs.20-26)
6. Who is produced? (vs.27-30)

Consider

1. We have met two crucial players in the account of God's people—Joseph and Judah. How would you describe Judah's character here?

How is this character portrayed in the account?

How does Judah's character develop and change in this account?

Contact

1. How does this account reveal the nature of God's mob?
2. How does this account reveal the nature of God?
3. What hope is there in this chapter? And, what is confronting?

Study 4: Genesis 39

Comprehend

1. Read Genesis 39.
2. Where is Joseph? (vs.1)
3. What explanation, and evidence, are we given for Joseph's situation? (vs.2-6)
4. A 'situation' is described—what is it? (vs.6-7)

How, and why, does Joseph deal with this situation? (vs.8-10)

5. How is this 'situation' 'resolved'? (vs.11-20)
6. What explanation, and evidence, are we given for Joseph's situation? (vs.21-23)

Consider

1. How far away is Joseph from his family? How far is Joseph away from God?
2. How does the LORD care for Joseph? How does this affect Joseph's life?
3. How do we see the development of Joseph as a character and person in these days?

Contact

1. What do we learn of the nature, and involvement, of the LORD here?
2. What do we learn about life as God's people here?
3. How might we be seeing a template of the life of Jesus here?

Study 5: Genesis 40

Comprehend

1. Read Genesis 40.

2. What is the scene set? (vs.1-4)

Why is verse 3 important? (cf. 39:21-23)

3. What do both these men have? (vs.5)

4. What does Joseph do, and offer? (vs.6-8)

5. The cupbearer goes first—what do we learn? (vs.9-15)

6. The baker goes second—what do we learn? (vs.16-19)

7. What is revealed? (vs.20-22)

What happens to Joseph? (vs.23)

Consider

1. How does Joseph deal with the situation in front of him?

Why is this important?

Contact

1. What does this section reveal about the nature, and actions, of God?
2. What do we learn about—and see of—Joseph?
3. How might this episode show us Jesus?

Study 6: Genesis 41

Comprehend

1. Read Genesis 41.
2. When are we, and where are we? (vs.1)
3. What are Pharaoh's two dreams? (vs.1-7)

What is the problem? (vs.8)

4. Who re-emerges, and what is revealed? (vs.9-13)

What does Pharaoh do? (vs.14-15)

How is Joseph's response revealing? (vs.16)

5. Pharaoh speaks his dreams to Joseph (vs.17-24). Joseph interprets the dreams—what does he say, and who does he credit? (vs.25-32)
6. What does Joseph suggest? (vs.33-36)
7. What is Pharaoh's response? (vs.37-45)
8. How is the Joseph administration described? (vs.46-57)

Consider

1. What kind of world does Pharaoh live in—and Joseph?
2. How does Joseph's consistent response help us understand these worlds?
3. Why is it important to understand whether this is a description, or prescription... and which is it?
4. How do these events help us understand Joseph's original dreams?

Contact

1. What kind of God does Joseph serve?
2. What kind of man is Joseph revealed as?
3. How would you describe Joseph's ascent to power?
4. How might Joseph serve as a type/model/foreshadow of Jesus?