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# GENESIS: IT ALL STARTS HERE

## *A TRAGIC LEGACY*

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A message presented by Pastor Marc Minter  
to First Baptist Church of Diana, TX on October 16, 2016

### INTRODUCTION

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This morning we pick back up on our study through the book of Genesis. The last time we were in Genesis, the location was chapter 35. That's where Jacob received his new name (Israel), after he had finally committed himself to real obedience and put away all that had distracted him from submitting more fully to God's promises and providence.

You may also remember that Jacob's relationship with his brother (Esau) was mostly put back together after it had been so badly broken by selfish desire and devious actions (Jacob lied and disguised himself to swindle Esau out of their father's blessing). Jacob's greedy subversion had hardened Esau against his brother, but time had softened his heart. Where we pick up with their story today, they (Jacob and Esau) were both living in relative peace and prosperity.

**We now turn to chapter 36**, but it is more of a break in the storyline than a continuation of it. In fact, it is a chapter-full of genealogy; and anyone who has ever read through the Bible will understand how genealogies can be. If we read them at all, which we should, we often read them sort of like we might read a bunch of numbers. Each number means something, and numbers listed together are in some kind of relationship with one another, but "who knows what that might be..."

Genealogies can feel like that to us. We might feel our minds disengaging as we read through a genealogy in the Bible, and many people overlook them altogether.

### **Well, why is chapter 36 here?**

We don't learn anything about God's covenant people here. We don't learn anything about God's unfolding plan of redemption. It is essentially a long genealogy for a family group that has seemingly nothing to do with God working in human history to bring about the *serpent-conquering offspring*.

**So, why is chapter 36 in Genesis?** Why is this content in the Bible at all? Is it unnecessary? Can we just skip over it?

Well, 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says, “*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, [so] that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*”

**Therefore, we must first say that Genesis 36 is not unnecessary.** It cannot be left out or skipped over, just because we don’t easily see its relevance or importance. Because “all Scripture” is “God-breathed,” it is (by the very nature of what it is) profitable indeed!

**So, we must not ask, “Is this really necessary?” Instead, we should ask, “What does God intend to teach us by including this chapter in sacred Scripture?”**

John Darby answers this question by summarizing what he believes is the purpose of this chapter. Darby said, “The apostate world [those who do not fear or trust God] establishes itself in power, while the heirs of promise are still poor pilgrims upon the earth.” Then he said, “This last [part] is a distinct point of revelation.”<sup>1</sup>

Darby concisely points out the very heart of what I intend to communicate today. **First**, that there is an obvious (at least once you slow down enough to consider it)... an obvious contrast between Esau’s worldly success and Jacob’s lack thereof. **Second**, the whole affair is a major theme throughout the Bible.

Of course, the pastoral responsibility is not only to point out what is there, but also to press the implications upon you – the congregation. So, I intend to do that as well.

I will only read a portion of chapter 36 aloud today, and I will include the final few verses of chapter 35 in order to help us feel the transition I think we are meant to experience as we read.

### **GENESIS 35:27-36:8**

27 And Jacob came to his father Isaac at Mamre, or Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had sojourned. 28 Now the days of Isaac were 180 years. 29 And Isaac breathed his last, and he died and was gathered to his people, old and full of days.

*And his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.*

**36:1 These are the generations of Esau (that is, Edom).**

2 Esau took his wives from the Canaanites: Adah the daughter of Elon the Hittite, Oholibamah the daughter of Anah the daughter of Zibeon the Hivite, 3 and Basemath, Ishmael’s daughter, the sister of Nebaioth.

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.christianity.com/bible/commentary.php?com=drby&b=1&c=36>

4 And Adah bore to Esau, Eliphaz; Basemath bore Reuel; 5 and Oholibamah bore Jeush, Jalam, and Korah.

These are the sons of Esau who were born to him in the land of Canaan.

6 Then Esau took his wives, his sons, his daughters, and all the members of his household, his livestock, all his beasts, and all his property that he had acquired in the land of Canaan.

*He went into a land away from his brother Jacob.* 7 For their possessions were too great for them to dwell together. The land of their sojournings could not support them because of their livestock.

8 So Esau settled in the hill country of Seir. (Esau is Edom.)

## MESSAGE OUTLINE:

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### (1) SOME HIGHLIGHTS AND BLEMISHES

### (2) WHO WAS ESAU, AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

### (3) THE INTENDED CONTRAST AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MAJOR THEME

### (4) WHAT ARE SOME THINGS WE SHOULD LEARN FROM GENESIS 36?

## MESSAGE:

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### (1) SOME HIGHLIGHTS AND BLEMISHES

In the passage we just read, we see both glorious highlights and terrible blemishes. **One highlight** is that Jacob and Esau were together at the burial of their father, Isaac (Gen. 35:29). You may recall that this was exactly opposite of Esau's previous promise to kill Jacob after the death of their father (Gen. 27:41). Esau and Jacob had experienced some incredible reconciliation in their relationship.

**Another highlight** is that Isaac was in Mamre and Jacob came to be with him there (Gen. 35:27). Mamre was a particular place in Canaan, where Abraham and Sarah were buried (Gen. 23:19, 25:9). Isaac was buried there too (Gen. 35:29), and Jacob would later be buried there as well (Gen. 50:13). A family burial plot meant they were claiming the land as their own, and such a claim was certainly warranted.

God had promised to give the land of Canaan to Abraham (Gen. 13:14-18), to Isaac (Gen. 26:1-5), and to Jacob (35:9-15). God essentially promised the land as a feature

of His blessings **to** and **through** this line of humanity. This family was acting in obedience to the promises and commands of God.

**While highlights are nice, blemishes are embarrassing and painful;** and this passage has no shortage of blemishes. Chapter 36 verse 2 begins the description of Esau and his lineage by telling us that Esau took “Canaanite wives,” and at least one of them was “Ishmael’s daughter.” This has great significance, and it is a serious blemish; but we may not see it very easily, so allow me to explain a bit.

You may recall that Abraham made a big deal about his son, Isaac, having a wife from among his relatives (Gen. 24:1-4), and Isaac made a big deal about the same thing for his son, Jacob (Gen. 28:1-3). There were several reasons for this, but one major motivator was theological. What I mean is, these two fathers wanted their two sons to marry wives who would not have such terrible theology. It may seem strange to many of us, considering we don’t generally think of theological positions as high concerns in our dating relationships or spouse selection. But, this is not as unimportant as we might initially think.

**Consider this:** The basis, the very foundation of a good marriage is an agreement that Christ is Lord and that Christ is the perfect example for both husband and wife to follow. I cannot tell you how many couples I have seen struggle and eventually fail because they simply do not agree on these basic theological truths. In the end, it will not matter how you squeeze the toothpaste, where you sit at the dinner table, or how much money you do or do not have... Is Christ Lord? Will we seek to follow His example of humble obedience and selfless love? If husband and wife committedly answer “yes” to these questions, then everything else will find its place.

**Abraham and Isaac had both heard the promises of God Almighty;** and they had imperfectly sought to live obediently before God. However, the people of Canaan were utterly pagan. They worshiped false gods and built their lives upon false theology. A major concern for Abraham and Isaac was that their offspring would continue in right belief, remembering the one true God and His promises of blessing. One major hindrance to right belief would be the intrusion of false gods and bad theology into the family.

Incidentally, we do see some of this in Jacob’s wives and sons when they bring their false gods into the family. But, Isaac and Jacob married women who came from the family line that knew at least something of God’s promises and His commands (Gen. 11:31; cf. Gen. 12:1-4).

**Esau, on the other hand, did the exact opposite.** He married “Canaanite women,” and he did so precisely because Isaac commanded Jacob not to (Gen. 28:8-9). Esau basically told his dad, “*You don’t want me to marry this kind of woman? Well then, I will have a few of them!*” This blemish had lasting consequences for generations.

**Another blemish** in our passage is the departure of Esau from Canaan – the land of promise. Moses records the withdrawal by saying “**He went into a land away from his brother**” (Gen. 36:6) and “**Esau settled in the hill country of Seir**” (Gen. 36:8). No matter his motives, like Lot’s departure from Abraham, Esau’s departure from Jacob was more than just a geographical move. It was a rejection of God Himself.

**Matthew Henry says** that Esau’s likely motivation was to give Jacob his rightful inheritance; after all, it was Jacob who did actually receive Isaac’s blessing (Gen. 25:29-34, cf. 27:26-29).

**Jamieson, Faussett, and Brown say** that the language of verse 6 (“he went into a land away from his brother”) suggests more of a selfish desire on Esau’s part. This is certainly in keeping with his character, as it is revealed in Scripture, and it does seem plausible. It is as though Esau said, “*I’m blowing this small town, and I’ll figure out where I’m going when I get there.*”

**All of these bible scholars** see God’s hand of providence in Esau’s departure. God had promised blessings (including the land of Canaan) to Jacob and his descendants, and Esau’s future was prophesied to be “apart from” his brother (Gen. 27:39-40). **Calvin** said, “**Let us, then, learn from the passage before us, to see, by the eyes of faith, both in accidental circumstances (as they are called) and in the evil desires of men, that secret providence of God, which directs all events to [His determined results].**”<sup>2</sup> Indeed, we may see God working out His plan in both the highlights and the blemishes of human actions.

**There is always more we could discuss, but let us press on to the focus of our message today.**

**I will now ask, and try to answer these two questions:**

## **(2) WHO WAS ESAU, AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?**

Genesis 36 is a break in the storyline for a reason, and we are wise to consider why. I think it will be helpful for us to understand the primary character of this chapter (Esau) and the importance of describing him and his offspring in this way. So, who was Esau, and why does it matter?

### **Who was Esau?**

Kent Hughes quoted Alexander Whyte’s description of Esau in his commentary on Genesis. Whyte said,

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<sup>2</sup><http://www.christianity.com/bible/commentary.php?com=clvn&b=1&c=36>

“Esau was full of the manliest interests, occupations, and pursuits. He was a very proverb of courage, endurance, and success in the chase. He was the ruggedest, the brawniest, and the shaggiest of all the rugged, brawny, and shaggy creatures of the field... Esau had an eye like an eagle. His ear never slept. His foot took the firmest hold of the ground. And his hand was always full both of skill, and strength... Esau’s arrow never missed its mark. He was the pride of all the encampment as he came home at night with his traps, and his snares, and his bows, and his arrows, and laden to the earth with venison for his father’s supper. Burned black with the sun; beaten hard and dry with the wind; a prince of men; a prime favourite both with men, and women, and children...”<sup>3</sup>

This is more than I have learned about Esau in my study of Genesis, but this description agrees with my less detailed and less colorful assessment. Esau was something of a *good ol’ boy*.

Here are some of the qualities I have seen in Esau:

**Impulsive.** Esau was a man who lived for the moment. Just think of how he spoke of his birthright. Esau basically said, “*I am hungry right now... what good is a birthright that I won’t inherit for years?*” (Gen. 25:32). His impulsive actions were foolish; they are the picture of immediate gratification. While maturity is often measured by one’s ability to consider the benefits of delay, Esau was a man ready to make a decision about anything at a moment’s notice.

**Emotional.** Esau was driven by his emotions. Certainly, emoting is not a bad thing (even though it may surprise some of you to hear me say that). People feel all kinds of things, and even the most stoic men are not immune. But feelings should never sit in the driver’s seat of our lives. Esau made huge life-decisions based on emotional outbursts (Gen. 28:8-9), and this is unwise to say the least. Godly men are self-controlled; they are not controlled by their emotions.

**Carnal.** Esau gave himself over to his fleshly desires. His hunger for food caused him to “despise his birthright” (Gen. 25:34); and his hunger for something else caused him to take more wives than any other main character in the storyline of Genesis (Gen. 26:34-35, 28:8-9, 36:2-3). Esau was a man who arranged for his sinful lusts instead of warring against them. Such a man is not uncommon (in the ancient world or in our own day), but it is important to note the destructive path that sinful lusts create for those who follow instead of lead. Sin is pleasurable for a time, but the enslavement that comes with it will last long after the pleasure is forgotten.

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<sup>3</sup>Hughes, R. Kent (2004-10-26). Genesis: Beginning and Blessing (Preaching the Word) (p. 427). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

**Worldly.** Esau did not care to think of eternal things; his focus was only on this world. He did not care for the divine covenant, nor did he have any difficulty leaving the land of divine promise. Esau was after worldly power and a worldly kingdom; and this is exactly what Genesis informs us about in chapter 36.

So, this impulsive, emotional, carnal, and worldly man (and the line of his people who followed him) is the subject of an entire chapter of Genesis...

But why did Moses take such time to address this information here? Why did God inspire Moses to write a genealogical history of this man and his descendants?

Doesn't it seem odd to read what appears to be a commemoration of Esau and the kingdoms he produced right here in the story of God's redemptive history?

On this matter, one Bible scholar said, "This commemoration... resembles an honorable [tombstone]. For although Esau, with his posterity, took the precedence; yet this dignity was like a bubble... [As] it has been before said of other profane nations, so now Esau is exalted as on a lofty theater. But since there is no permanent [situation] out of the kingdom of God, the splendor attributed to him is [fleeting], and the whole of his pomp departs like the passing scene of the stage."<sup>4</sup>

Let us remember that the scene is worldly, but the larger story is much bigger. God is at work here, and Esau's kingdom is like a bottle-rocket when compared with the noonday sun.

### **So, why, then, does Esau and his progeny matter?**

Esau's worldly success (and the progressive increase of worldly success among his descendants) is stuck right here as a direct contrast against Jacob's worldly weakness. It matters because we are very quick to look for worldly success over the real thing, and this ancient story provides us with a great picture of how things really are.

The tale told in Genesis 36 is a fascinating one. If we will read with our minds attentive, then we will see that there is much maneuvering and kingdom-building here. Kent Hughes explains the progression as follows: "Esau prospered far beyond the Israelites, so that while Israel suffered famine and migration and captivity in Egypt, Edom expanded and even developed a succession of kings. [But], this came at the price of profound assimilation."

Hughes sees verses 1-8 as sort of an overview of Esau's genealogy, and then the rest of the chapter as a greater description of this shorter section. Like Genesis 1 and 2,

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<sup>4</sup><http://www.christianity.com/bible/commentary.php?com=clvn&b=1&c=36>

there is an expansion and repetition here. Hughes goes on to explain (follow it with me in your Bible), “In the first section of the enlarged genealogy (verses 9-14) intermarriage was tentative, and native wives were only accorded the status of ‘concubines.’”

“But the next section (verses 15-19), Hughes continues, “indicates that intermarriage had become [expected among Esau’s sons] and that the indigenous people were accorded [a] higher status.

By the third section (verses 20-30), Esau had displaced the native people and had married into a leading family. The picture here is one of violent invasion by Esau’s clan followed by the absorption of the native populace into the ‘descendants of Esau.’ [Then],” Hughes says, “mutual absorption and assimilation moved into high gear.

The fourth section (verses 31-39) is not a genealogy but a list of eight kings who reigned in Edom prior to the monarchy in Israel. Edom became wealthy and powerful long before Israel....” And this is not to go unnoticed by us. Verse 31 is a shockwave that should signal a meaningful emphasis for the whole chapter. “*These are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom, before any king reigned over the Israelites.*”

“Finally,” Hughes concludes, “the fifth section (verses 40-43) emphasizes the spheres of ownership and influence of the leading Edomite families, all the way to “Elah” on the Gulf of Akaba. Esau was flourishing by the sword in Edom, just as [God’s] “blessing” had predicted (cf. 27: 39, 40).”<sup>5</sup>

So, we are to understand that Esau was a very successful man by worldly standards. He founded a land and a nation (the Edomites). His fame and power would continue on in his family line for centuries, and we even read of an Edomite who became king of Judea and warred against Jesus Christ Himself (Matt. 2). Herod the Great was descended from the Edomites, and it was his fear of the infant-King that motivated his decree that all male children in Bethlehem under 2 years of age should be killed.

Esau’s success was great indeed, and it was lasting. As we considered Darby’s synopsis earlier, let us be reminded that “The apostate world [those who do not fear or trust God] establishes itself in power, while the heirs of promise are still poor pilgrims upon the earth.” Then he said, “This last [part] is a distinct point of revelation.”<sup>6</sup>

Let’s now consider the dramatic contrast and the significance of this “distinct point” or major theme in the Scriptures.

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<sup>5</sup>Hughes, R. Kent (2004-10-26). Genesis: Beginning and Blessing (Preaching the Word) (pp. 432-433). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

<sup>6</sup><http://www.christianity.com/bible/commentary.php?com=drby&b=1&c=36>

### (3) THE INTENDED CONTRAST & THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MAJOR THEME

The Bible is not just a single book, but a small library of books. These various books provide different kinds of literature and different angles for the reader to enjoy. One of the major literary genres of the Bible is *narrative* (or story-telling). Sometimes it is just the basic facts, and sometimes it includes more vibrant detail.

**In the narrative portions of Scripture**, we see real-life examples of what the Bible teaches us elsewhere. For instance, the psalmist tells us, “**the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever**” (Ps. 117:2); but the book of Joshua provides a record of how God kept His promises to Abraham’s descendants for generations by miraculously bringing them into the land He had promised long ago. Both of these genres communicate God’s fidelity, but they do it in different ways.

Similarly, the Bible gives emphasis to some things more than others. In this way, Scripture tells us what things are more important and what things we are more likely to forget. One basic feature of a biblical worldview is established at the very beginning of the Bible and repeated throughout the pages of Scripture.

This feature is “***God’s power and triumph through weakness and suffering.***”

**Think of how God promised an “offspring”** who would triumph over the serpent of old (Gen. 3:15), and yet Abraham’s wife (Sarah) was unable to produce children (Gen. 11:30). The same thing was true about Isaac’s wife, Rebekah (Gen. 25:21), and Jacob’s wife, Rachel (Gen. 29:31). And yet, God brought forth “offspring” from these barren wombs. God showed Himself to be powerful, and He did this by working in the midst of human weakness and suffering.

**The contrasting weakness with strength** we are to see in Genesis 36 is between Jacob and Esau. Esau was a powerhouse from a worldly perspective, but Jacob was going to experience much suffering before he would ever enjoy the pleasures of his blessings. In our weeks ahead, we will explore more of the story, but it will do for now to tell you that Jacob would eventually need to be rescued from a great famine in Canaan. He and his family had to relocate to Egypt and take refuge under the resources of another king.

**And we should remember that Jacob’s descendants** would not do as well as Esau’s. Joseph (Jacob’s son) was extremely successful in Egypt, but his success was short-lived. The very next generation of Jacob’s family would be taken as slaves in the land of Egypt, and this bondage happened at the same time that Esau’s descendants were building their kingdom in Edom. The contrast is stark, and God intends for us to see His strength right in the middle of human weakness.

**Think about how God rescued His people from their slavery** under the later Egyptian Pharaoh. What did God send to their aid? An army of valiant warriors? A

group of terrifying angels? No... God sent a stuttering prophet, who doubted whether or not he would even be heard by the people he intended to save (Ex. 3:11, 13).

Out of this weak human position (a deliverer with no earthly kingdom, no resourceful servants, no skilled army, no political power, and no plan – except to just do whatever next thing God told him to do), God brought the Egyptian ruler to his knees, ridiculed the pantheon of Egypt’s false gods, and delivered the Hebrew people from bondage... And God did all of that without a single arrow or sword.

**This theme is a major one in all of Scripture**, and we see it all over the place. I’d like us to look at this theme on big display in the words of Christ in Mark chapter 8. In Luke 9 and Mark 8, Jesus calls His disciples to ***deny themselves*** in order to ***follow Him***.

This call to live according to spiritual realities, rather than earthly ones, came right after Jesus had rebuked Peter for “**setting his mind on the things of man**” rather than “**on the things of God**” (Mk. 8:33). Jesus called those who were listening to draw near to Him, and then He said, “**If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?**” (Mark 8:34–36).

**The call from Christ is plain here.** There is no confusion about what He is demanding from those who would follow Him. The difficulty is not in understanding, but the difficulty is in the doing of what Christ demands.

Jesus was talking about His own mortal demise in the verses just before these. Jesus was telling His disciples that He must suffer and die (Mk. 8:31), but they did not want to hear that stuff. They wanted Jesus to be a king like the earthly kings. They wanted Jesus to establish His kingdom by conquering through force and strength. But this is not the pattern of God in human history. Christ conquered the greatest human foe as He experienced the greatest human weakness.

The death of Christ brought about the death of death! What a glorious display of God’s power and wisdom!

Ah, but God’s power and wisdom are not just on display in the work of Christ. His power is also seen in those who follow Christ and receive the benefits of His work. We who love and trust Christ are called to enter into our own weakness, in order that God’s power might be seen for what it truly is.

Listen to the words of Jesus as though they are spoken directly to you today, for that is exactly the case. Jesus said, “**deny yourself**” and “**lose your life.**” He said to do these things, and your reward will be Christ Himself, eternal glory, and life forevermore.

What a difficult thing this is for sinners like us to do! It seems everything in us wants to do the opposite, and that is the point.

**We are probably naturally like Esau.** We see what is in front of us, and we want to enjoy the benefits of what we see. We want to get what we can by using the skill we have, and we want to build our kingdom as big as we are able.

**We are probably a lot like Peter.** We hear the words of Jesus, how His power must be displayed through weakness, and we recoil. We don’t want to hear about weakness and suffering; we want to hear only about how we are conquerors with Christ.

Ah, but it is precisely in our weakness... it is through worldly suffering and temporal powerlessness that God displays His dramatic and awesome power.

**This theme is wrapped up tightly in the Gospel message itself.** All religious systems point to what you must do in order to earn your right standing before God, but the Gospel says, “**There is nothing you can do.**” The Gospel says, “**You are weaker than you can understand, and you are utterly powerless to do anything in hopes of saving yourself.**”

In the midst of your utter weakness, the triune God displays His marvelous power.

**The Father promises** you a Redeemer, and works in real human history to set the stage for His victorious work. **The Son enters** into human history, and accomplishes everything necessary to save your rotten soul. He lives perfectly, dies as your substitute, and conquers death to give you hope. **The Spirit visits** you in the dregs of your despair, and just when the realization of your depravity hits you like a ton of bricks, He graciously teaches you both to fear and to trust the God who saves.

Again I say, What a glorious display of God’s power and wisdom!

The biblical pattern is strong and repetitive: God displays His power entirely different than the world does.

**In human weakness and suffering, God shows Himself to be the truly powerful King of glory.**

While Esau is a picture of worldly power, we should remember that he is also a picture of the futility of such power.

#### **(4) WHAT ARE SOME THINGS WE SHOULD LEARN FROM GENESIS 36?**

I think we can learn at least these several things.

**First**, we should understand that worldly success is not always a sign of spiritual weakness, but the two are often at odds.

**Second**, we should understand that our expectation should not be for worldly success and comfort.

**Third**, we should not expect that worldly power will bring us real success.

**Fourth**, we should heed this warning, and seek those things that are eternal over those things that are temporal

One Bible teacher said, “For every generation, the challenge is the same— to see that there is more to life than a meal, or a video game, or baseball, or a party, or a movie, or an indulgence of some kind— to see, as Paul put it, that “the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal” (2 Corinthians 4: 18).

The challenge is to “seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God,” to “set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth” (Colossians 3: 1, 2).

The challenge is to forgo the lazy brain death that comes so easily to the young who ignore the teaching and preaching of God’s Word— and to listen with all you have. Do not sell what God has given you through his Word, your church, and your family for a cheap pleasure.”<sup>7</sup>

#### SUGGESTED RESOURCES:

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Online Bible Commentaries

<http://www.christianity.com/bible/commentary.php?com=clvn&b=1&c=36>

“Blessings for Esau” from Ligonier.org

<http://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/blessings-esau/>

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<sup>7</sup>Hughes, R. Kent (2004-10-26). Genesis: Beginning and Blessing (Preaching the Word) (pp. 433-434). Crossway. Kindle Edition.