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The Written Account of the Generations of Esau 36:1 to 37:1



Moses edited and compiled eleven family documents in the book of **Genesis**. The major structural word for **Genesis** is *toldot*, which means **the written account of**, or *this is what became of these men and their descendants*. The noun is often translated *generations*, *histories* or *descendants*. After the section on the written account of the generations of Jacob from **25:19** to **35:29**, we have the tenth *toldot*, **the written account of the generations of Esau**. **The previous toldot told us about the establishment of Jacob, the son of promise, and the nation of Isra'el. Part of what became of Jacob was Esau; therefore, this tenth family document tells us about the dispensing of his non-seed line. Because he was Isaac's son, God would make him into a great nation, but he was not the son of promise.**

It is now clear that the last five *toldots* have a carefully constructed structure. The non-seed lines of **Ishmael** and **Esau** alternate with **Abraham**, **Isaac**, **Jacob** and **Joseph** to form *the line of blessing*.

The toldot of Terah (the Abraham narrative) 11:27 to 25:11

The toldot of Ishmael 25:12-18

The toldot of Isaac (the Jacob narrative) 25:19 to 35:29

The toldot of Esau 36:1 to 37:1

The toldot of Jacob (the Joseph narrative) 37:2 to 50:26

Like his brother, **Jacob**, **Esau** grew into a great nation, the Edomites. This is the fulfillment of **God's** promise to Rebekah when the twins were born: **Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated (25:23)**. The Edomites lived in **Mount Seir**, south and east of the Dead Sea, rather than Canaan. Thus, this *toldot* is the fulfillment of the patriarchal blessing given to **Isaac** in **25:23** and **27:39-40**.

It also explains the future relationship between the nations of **Isra'el** and **Edom**. The descendants of **Esau** play a frequently antagonistic role in **Isra'el's** history (see the commentary on **Numbers Dj - The Resistance of Edom**). Throughout the period of the judges and the monarchy, **Isra'el** experienced periodic military harassment from **the Edomites**. The worst display of hostilities was when the Babylonians came to Jerusalem and destroyed the Solomon's Temple in 586 BC. The prophet **Obediah** pronounced doom on **the Edomites** because **on the day you (Edom) stood aloof while strangers (the Babylonians) carried off his (Judah's) treasure, and foreigners entered his gates to cast lots for Yerushalayim, and you were no different from them (Obediah 1:11)**. Because of **Edom's** history of mistreatment against its **brother**, **the house of Jacob will be a fire and the house of Joseph a flame; the house of Esau will be stubble, and they will set it on fire and consume it. There will be no survivors from the house of Esau, for ADONAI has spoken (Obediah 1:18)**.

The role of **Esau's** foreign wives has been accented (**36:2-5**) in order to emphasize that **Esau** stepped outside of **God's** will. **His** genealogy also includes the detail that **his** descendants, like those of **Ishmael** before him, settled outside the Promised Land (see **36:6-8** and compare it to **25:18**). Having thus dispensed with the non-seed line of **Esau**, Moses, the human narrator, is now prepared to follow the promises of **God** through the descendants of **Jacob**, which he will do in the last major unit of **Genesis**, the **Joseph** narrative.⁵⁴³