

February 5-Genesis 36

In the midst of a ton of names none of us can pronounce, Genesis 36 gives us a verse that speaks volumes about the difference between Esau and Jacob. Verse 31 tells us, “These are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom before any king reigned over the Israelites.” At first glance this verse seems to suggest that Israel just must not have been as organized as the descendants of Esau. Why else would Edom have all of these kings before Israel? The answer to that question is actually quite the opposite and it teaches us something about the difference between the descendants of Esau and the descendants of Jacob (God’s chosen people).

To understand this difference, we must understand why Israel did not have a king. Before Israel had a king, they operated under God’s law (He was their ultimate king) and God often instituted people called “judges” which were leaders who were primarily involved in leading military operations. There is an entire book of the Bible dedicated to discussing the era of the Judges. Often the people of Israel would rebel against God at which time He would allow them to be attacked and/or conquered. Once the people had been attacked/conquered they would cry out for mercy and God would send a “judge” or a leader. It is important to understand that this “judge” had authority but only as someone sent by the ultimate King, God Himself.

So, this system was in place all the way to 1 Samuel 8 when the people of Israel decided they no longer wanted to be ruled by an “invisible” king but rather by a human king. The Bible is very clear that this was rebellion against God Himself, and most often the kings of Israel turned from God and the entire nation suffered. Truthfully, this has always been the pattern of humanity. Someone rises to power, gets arrogant and prideful and turns into a monster. People, historically, have suffered more under kings than lived pleasant lives. God tried to save Israel from such a lifestyle as Israel had the opportunity to serve under a perfect king. One who would never take advantage of them or make bad military decisions, a king that would not tax them more than they could bear and a king who honestly loved them and was trustworthy. Esau’s descendants never tried this approach. Instead, they almost immediately instituted a king and lived like the rest of the world.

So, what’s the lesson? The lesson is that God’s people can operate differently than the rest of the world. Esau’s descendants needed a king immediately because they did not serve the true King, God Himself. They were totally lost without some man made system of government that dictated their behavior. Israel did not need such a system because they were controlled and led by God. They knew that ultimate authority was found only in Him and they were called to submit to Him. Today, we as believers don’t need laws and regulations instituted by man to control us or alter our behavior because we live under the power and authority of God. Our citizenship is ultimately in heaven (Philippians 3:20) because we have been redeemed and bought by our gracious Savior and Lord Jesus Christ. Christians eagerly await the return of our king but in the meantime we take our guidance by God’s Holy Spirit through His inspired Word as it serves to control our steps and leads us to be righteous and holy apart from any man made law. Let us never forget that even though we live under human governments (which we submit to and respect) our ultimate authority and hope is our God and king in heaven.