

Genesis, Part 32

We now shift and take a look at what has become of Esau. He lives to the south of the Dead Sea in Edom. Esau was the father of the Edomites, thus the Edomites are also descendants of Abraham. Genesis 36 goes into great detail about the descendants of Esau through his three wives. Why such detail about one who was not part of the covenant line? The key seems to be in verse 31. Kings were promised to Jacob's line (35:11).

This section shows how the promises were being fulfilled. Esau's migration left Canaan to Jacob. Rebekah had been told that two nations were in her womb and that "the older will serve the younger" (25:23). The emergence of Edom as a kingdom, recorded here, and its later subjection to Israel fulfilled these ancient predictions. If these relatively minor predictions came true, how much more certain is the fulfillment of the central promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob?

Genesis 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. 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.)

Esau had three wives: Adah, Oholibamah, and Basemath. Since two of these wives' names are not the same as those listed earlier in Chapters 26:34 and 28:9, either the others had died, or he favored these three among others, or the two took different names.

Being the daughter of Ishmael, Basemath was an Ishmalite. Oholibamah was a great-granddaughter of Seir the Horite, whose descendants were living in Edom when Esau went there (36:20, 25). From these three wives, Esau had five sons. Esau's sons were born in the land before he moved to Seir. This contrasts sharply with Jacob, whose children were born out of the land, and who then moved into the land. Second, Esau was Edom. All through the chapter, the reader is reminded of this. Certainly, Israel would understand the importance of this because she often struggled with the Edomites, Esau's descendants (Gen. 36:43).

Gen 36:9 These are the generations of Esau the father of the Edomites in the hill country of Seir. ¹⁰ These are the names of Esau's sons:

Eliphaz the son of Adah the wife of Esau, Reuel the son of Basemath the wife of Esau. ¹¹ The sons of Eliphaz were Teman, Omar, Zepho, Gatam, and Kenaz. ¹² (Timna was a concubine of Eliphaz, Esau's son; she bore Amalek to Eliphaz.) These are the sons of Adah, Esau's wife. ¹³ These are the sons of Reuel: Nahath, Zerah, Shammah, and Mizzah. These are the sons of Basemath, Esau's wife. ¹⁴ These are the sons of Oholibamah the daughter of Anah the daughter of Zibeon, Esau's wife: she bore to Esau Jeush, Jalam, and Korah.

¹⁵ These are the chiefs of the sons of Esau. The sons of Eliphaz the firstborn of Esau: the chiefs Teman, Omar, Zepho, Kenaz, ¹⁶ Korah, Gatam, and Amalek; these are the chiefs of Eliphaz in the land of Edom; these are the sons of Adah. ¹⁷ These are the sons of Reuel, Esau's son: the chiefs Nahath, Zerah, Shammah, and Mizzah; these are the chiefs of Reuel in the land of Edom; these are the sons of Basemath, Esau's wife. ¹⁸ These are the sons of Oholibamah, Esau's wife: the chiefs Jeush, Jalam, and Korah; these are the chiefs born of Oholibamah the daughter of Anah, Esau's wife. ¹⁹ These are the sons of Esau (that is, Edom), and these are their chiefs.

The sons of Esau also had sons. Thus Esau had 5 sons and 10 grandsons (either literal descendants and/or tribes founded by them). In the Hebrew, each of the 10 grandsons and 3 of the sons—13 in all—was called a “chief,” a head of a tribe. A picture of Esau as an overlord is beginning to emerge.

Gen 36:20 These are the sons of Seir the Horite, the inhabitants of the land: Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah, ²¹ Dishon, Ezer, and Dishan; these are the chiefs of the Horites, the sons of Seir in the land of Edom. ²² The sons of Lotan were Hori and Hemam; and Lotan's sister was Timna. ²³ These are the sons of Shobal: Alvan, Manahath, Ebal, Shepho, and Onam. ²⁴ These are the sons of Zibeon: Aiah and Anah; he is the Anah who found the hot springs in the wilderness, as he pastured the donkeys of Zibeon his father. ²⁵ These are the children of Anah: Dishon and Oholibamah the daughter of Anah. ²⁶ These are the sons of Dishon: Hemdan, Eshban, Ithran, and Cheran. ²⁷ These are the sons of Ezer: Bilhan, Zaavan, and Akan. ²⁸ These are the sons of Dishan: Uz and Aran. ²⁹ These are the chiefs of the Horites: the chiefs Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah, ³⁰ Dishon, Ezer, and Dishan; these are the chiefs of the Horites, chief by chief in the land of Seir.

These verses list the “sons” (i.e., sons, grandsons, and granddaughters) of Seir the Horite, inhabitants of the land. These were aboriginal Edomites conquered by Esau. Deuteronomy 2:12 tells us what happened to these Horites that were in the land.

Deut. 2:12 The Horites also lived in Seir formerly, but the people of Esau dispossessed them and destroyed them from before them and settled in their place,

Seir's 7 sons became Horite chiefs and from those came 20 “sons” or “daughters” (i.e., tribes). One of Esau's wives was Oholibamah, a great-granddaughter of Seir.

Gen 36:31 These are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom, before any king reigned over the Israelites. ³² Bela the son of Beor reigned in Edom, the name of his city being Dinhabah. ³³ Bela died, and Jobab the son of Zerah of Bozrah reigned in his place. ³⁴ Jobab died, and Husham of the land of the Temanites reigned in his place. ³⁵ Husham died, and Hadad the son of Bedad, who defeated Midian in the country of Moab, reigned in his place, the name of his city being Avith. ³⁶ Hadad died, and Samlah of Masrekah reigned in his place. ³⁷ Samlah died, and Shaul of Rehoboth on the Euphrates reigned in his place. ³⁸ Shaul died, and Baal-hanan the son of Achbor reigned in his place. ³⁹ Baal-hanan the

son of Achbor died, and Hadar reigned in his place, the name of his city being Pau; his wife's name was Mehetabel, the daughter of Matred, daughter of Mezahab.

It is not certain how the kings of Edom were related to Esau, but they were kings who reigned in Edom, and "Esau ... is Edom" (v. 8). Jacob's national name is Israel, and Esau's national name is Edom. The organization of the clans in Edom apparently paralleled that in Israel. They ultimately chose a king from one of their tribes and carried on a line of succession from him. Whether or not the line of eight kings mentioned here extends beyond the time of Jacob and Esau is unclear. The point is comparative, though: there were kings in Edom before any Israelite king reigned.

Gen 36:40 These are the names of the chiefs of Esau, according to their clans and their dwelling places, by their names: the chiefs Timna, Alvah, Jetheth, ⁴¹ Oholibamah, Elah, Pinon, ⁴² Kenaz, Teman, Mibzar, ⁴³ Magdiel, and Iram; these are the chiefs of Edom (that is, Esau, the father of Edom), according to their dwelling places in the land of their possession.

These verses list the names of the chiefs who descended from Esau, thus Esau was a great, powerful overlord: the father of the Edomites and over clans and regions, with 11 chiefs descended from him. Isaac's promises to Esau were thus being fulfilled: and by being away from Jacob, he was shaking the "yoke" of his brother from his "neck" (Gen 27:39–40). God had made promises to Esau (27:39), and this chapter confirms that God keeps his word! Esau's death is not recorded, perhaps because he despised his birthright.

Joseph's Story

Gen 37:1 Jacob lived in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan.

In Chapter 37, the story shifts to Joseph, the elder son of Jacob and Rachel. In dramatic contrast with the expanding, powerful Esau, Jacob was

dwelling in the land of the sojournings of his father ... the land of Canaan. Unlike Esau, Jacob had no “chiefs” or kings yet, no lands to govern, and no full tribes. He was a sojourner. A promised spiritual blessing demands patience and faith. Waiting while others prosper is a test of one’s faithfulness and perseverance.

The story of Joseph in Egypt forms a unique literary unit in the Book of Genesis. The fact that there are repeated elements in the narratives does not prove that the material was handed down in two differing traditions as many critical scholars suggest. Repetition is the hallmark of the Hebrew style; it serves to heighten the message by giving it multiple emphases.

One example of repetition is the analogy between the stories of Jacob and Joseph. Both narratives begin with the father being deceived and the brothers being treacherous. Both include 20 years of separation, with the younger brother in a foreign land. Both conclude with a reunion and reconciliation of the brothers. As God had worked out matters to a proper resolution with Jacob, He would do the same with his son Joseph.

The story of Joseph was also instructive for Israel. As Joseph spent years in bondage in Egypt before being delivered, the descendants of Jacob would be in bondage there and would then be delivered from it. For Joseph, the discipline would test his faith, but for the nation, the stay in Egypt would be for their preservation and discipline.

The theme of suffering as a test of character is predominant both for Joseph and his brothers. Though Joseph was righteous he was not kept from suffering. He was preserved by his faith through it. In the end, Joseph could acknowledge that God meant it all for good (50:20). The Bible assures the faithful that God brings good out of evil and suffering. Though the wicked may prosper for a time, the righteous hold fast to their integrity because there is a higher, more enduring principle of life. The wise recognize that the Lord God is sovereign over nature and the nations and that He righteously orders the affairs of His people. At times, God’s ways seem unfair, but if endured by faith they bring blessings to the righteous.

Gen 37:2 These are the generations of Jacob.

Joseph, being seventeen years old, was pasturing the flock with his brothers. He was a boy with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives. And Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father. ³ Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons because he was the son of his old age. And he made him a robe of many colors. ⁴ But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peacefully to him.

The heading introduces this section as the “generations” (ESV, “history” in the NJKV) of Jacob. The Hebrew word is *tôledôt* and can be translated as generations, genealogy, history, or account. We are about to begin the story of the life of Joseph.

He is introduced as an obedient 17-year-old son who brought back a “bad report” about his half-brothers. While the Hebrew implies it isn't something good, the substance of this report is not given. Though tattling has never been popular, it shows that Joseph was faithful as a servant. Naturally, his brothers hated him for it.

The lad was honored by Jacob who gave him a richly ornamented robe, probably a multicolored tunic. The Hebrew suggests the possibility that this tunic had sleeves which would be unusual. This seems to signify that Jacob favored Joseph above the rest, with the intent of granting him all or a larger portion of the inheritance. Joseph was the firstborn of Rachel, Jacob's loved wife. Yet Jacob should have remembered what parental favoritism does to a family. It had separated him from his loving mother (27:1–28:5), and it would separate Joseph from Jacob.

Gen 37:5 Now Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers they hated him even more. ⁶ He said to them, “Hear this dream that I have dreamed: ⁷ Behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and stood upright. And behold, your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf.” ⁸ His brothers said to him, “Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us?” So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words. ⁹ Then he dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers and said, “Behold, I have dreamed another dream. Behold, the sun, the moon,

and eleven stars were bowing down to me.”¹⁰ But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him and said to him, “What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before you?”

¹¹ And his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying in mind.

God confirmed Jacob’s choice of his faithful son by two dreams, and by these two dreams, God predicted that Joseph would rule over his family. God’s revelation was often given in different forms in the Old Testament. He used dreams when His people were leaving the land or when in the lands of pagans. In a dream, God had announced to Abraham the Egyptian bondage when He said, “Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years” (Gen 15:13). In a dream, God promised protection and prosperity for Jacob in his sojourn with Laban (28:12, 15).

In verse 8 we have two similar terms used, “reign over us” and “rule over us”. They have similar meanings in English, but in Hebrew “reign” refers to being made a king or queen, while “rule” refers to having dominion or to rule, the act of reigning.

The brothers hated Joseph all the more and were jealous of him, but Jacob pondered the matter. He knew how God works; he was well aware that God could select the younger to rule over the elder, and that God could declare His choice in advance by an oracle or a dream.

The scene of the first dream was agricultural (v. 7). There is a hint here of how Joseph’s authority over his brothers would be achieved. His sheaf of grain was upright while their sheaves bowed down to his. It would be because of a famine in the land that his brothers would come to Joseph in Egypt seeking grain.

The scene of the second dream was celestial (v. 9). The sun, the moon, and 11 stars bowed down to him. In ancient cultures, these astronomical symbols represented rulers. Joseph’s father would be the sun; his mother,

the moon; and his 11 brothers are the stars. The dream symbolically anticipated the elevation of Joseph over the whole house of Jacob.

Sensing that Joseph was to be elevated to prominence over them, the envy and hatred of his brothers is understandable. However, their reaction in contrast with Joseph's honesty and faithfulness demonstrated why Jacob's choosing him was proper. God's sovereign choice of a leader often brings out the jealousy of those who must submit. Rather than recognize God's choice, his brothers set out to destroy him. Their actions, though prompted by the belief that they should lead, show why they should not have led.

Joseph Sold by His Brothers

Gen 37:12 Now his brothers went to pasture their father's flock near Shechem. 13 And Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers pasturing the flock at Shechem? Come, I will send you to them." And he said to him, "Here I am." 14 So he said to him, "Go now, see if it is well with your brothers and with the flock, and bring me word." So he sent him from the Valley of Hebron, and he came to Shechem. 15 And a man found him wandering in the fields. And the man asked him, "What are you seeking?" 16 "I am seeking my brothers," he said. "Tell me, please, where they are pasturing the flock." 17 And the man said, "They have gone away, for I heard them say, 'Let us go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan.

Shechem was about 50 miles north of where they lived, and Dothan was another 15 miles north of that. Joseph is sent Joseph to "see if it is well with your brothers and with the flock," then he was to report back. Why the brothers and the flocks were 65 miles away from where they lived is not stated. Jacob's dispatching Joseph to go check on them and reporting back suggests he was not overly trusting of them, but there are no indications of what his suspicions, if any, were concerning.

Gen 37:18 They saw him from afar, and before he came near to them they conspired against him to kill him. 19 They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer. 20 Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits. Then we will say that a fierce animal has devoured him, and we will see what will become of his dreams." 21 But when Reuben heard

it, he rescued him out of their hands, saying, “Let us not take his life.”
22 And Reuben said to them, “Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but do not lay a hand on him”—that he might rescue him out of their hand to restore him to his father. 23 So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the robe of many colors that he wore. 24 And they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.

The brothers devised a plot to kill that annoying dreamer to prevent his dreams from being fulfilled. Before, they had plotted to kill many Shechemites in revenge for their sister (34:24–29); now they plotted to kill their own brother! These are the future heads of the tribes of Israel – proof that God can use damaged people for His purposes.

Reuben was not on board for this murder plot and offered a solution. He suggested they not kill Joseph outright but just throw him alive into a dry cistern. Since he would eventually die from thirst and hunger, this slow death may have appealed to the brothers. Reuben, however, planned to go rescue Joseph later and restore him to his father. The brothers went along with Reuben’s plan. They stripped Joseph of his tunic and threw him into a dry cistern to die.

Gen 37:25 Then they sat down to eat. And looking up they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels bearing gum, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry it down to Egypt. 26 Then Judah said to his brothers, “What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? 27 Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother, our own flesh.” And his brothers listened to him. 28 Then Midianite traders passed by. And they drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. They took Joseph to Egypt.

As the brothers sat down to eat, along came a caravan of Ishmalites headed for Egypt. Judah gets the brilliant idea to make a few bucks off Joseph and prompts his brothers to sell him to the Ishmaelites. Ishmaelites were descendants of Abraham by Hagar (16:15). The Midianites (37:28) descended from Abraham by his concubine Keturah (25:2). The term Ishmaelites became a general designation for desert tribes so that

Midianite traders were also known as Ishmaelites. Joseph was treated harshly by his brothers; but being sold for 20 shekels (8 ounces of silver) and taken to Egypt, he was preserved alive.

Keep in mind that even in this evil plan, the hand of God is moving. Getting Joseph to Egypt is part of God's plan, and He is "working all things (evil included) together for good" (Rom 8:28).

Gen 37:29 When Reuben returned to the pit and saw that Joseph was not in the pit, he tore his clothes ³⁰ and returned to his brothers and said, "The boy is gone, and I, where shall I go?" ³¹ Then they took Joseph's robe and slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood. ³² And they sent the robe of many colors and brought it to their father and said, "This we have found; please identify whether it is your son's robe or not." ³³ And he identified it and said, "It is my son's robe. A fierce animal has devoured him. Joseph is without doubt torn to pieces." ³⁴ Then Jacob tore his garments and put sackcloth on his loins and mourned for his son many days. ³⁵ All his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted and said, "No, I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning." Thus his father wept for him.

Where was Reuben when the Ishmaelites showed up and bought Joseph to carry him off to Egypt? The text gives no hints, and we are left to assume he was off somewhere tending the sheep. Reuben returns to the cistern and finds Joseph gone, and "he tore his clothes". The tearing of one's clothes is a sign of grief and an act still observed in some Jewish communities today, though it is more symbolic and mostly limited maybe to a torn pocket.

Reuben immediately reports this to his brothers, but there is no indication that they told Reuben what they had done in his absence. They then took Joseph's coat, slaughtered a goat, and splashed the blood on the coat, agreeing to tell his father that a wild animal must have devoured him, and all they found was his bloodied coat.

The brothers carried the bloodied coat to their father and asked him to identify it as Joseph's coat, which of course he did. Believing that his

favorite son was dead, Jacob went into deep mourning. He tore his clothes and dressed in sackcloth and mourned his son “for many days”.

Sackcloth is a rough cloth made from animal hair, usually that of a goat or camel. In both Greek and ancient Near Eastern literature, it refers to a type of material used in various household duties such as the construction of clothing and sacks; the word can also refer to the clothing or sack itself. In the ancient Near East, the use of a garment made of sackcloth came to symbolize sorrow or submission. I have worn sackcloth. It is very uncomfortable! As a fraternity pledge in college, during Hell Week the pledges had to wear coats and ties to class – with a sack for underwear, so yes, I KNOW it is VERY uncomfortable.

Jacob’s children comforted him but to no avail. He said, “I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning.” He is saying he will die in his grief.

Gen 37:36 Meanwhile the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard.

This is a story of hatred and deception. The brothers tried to improve their lot with their father by wicked means. Jacob himself had attempted something similar with his father. The brothers would have to learn, however, as did Jacob, that God does not continue to give His blessings to those who do such things. Their use of goat’s blood is ironic, for the skins of a goat were used by Jacob to deceive his father (27:16). Jacob’s sin of years before had come back to haunt him. The brothers’ attitude would also have to be changed by God, or there would be no nation.

Here then is the beginning of the suffering of Joseph, the obedient servant. God would test his character through the things he suffered so that he could then be exalted.

“I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning.”

This statement by Jacob mourning for his “dead” son may seem odd. “Sheol” is sometimes translated as “grave” or “hell” and is part of the “Underworld”. It is assumed to be the place where the wicked were sent at death – Hades. But it is much more than that. As the name “Underworld” suggests, it is found inside the earth.

The Underworld is comprised of six different compartments, and each serves a different purpose. Most are related to damnation.

1. Tartarus - the Prison of the Fallen Angels, 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6
2. The Lake of Fire, Gehenna, the Final Hell, Mat 25:41; Rev 19:20; 20:10, 14-15
3. The Abyss – The Bottomless Pit
4. The Great Gulf that separates Paradise from Hell, Luke 16:19-31
5. Hell – Also called Torments is the abode of the souls of the wicked dead and is currently still occupied.
6. And lastly, we have Paradise – The abode of the souls of the Righteous Dead until Christ’s resurrection. It is now empty.

Tartarus is the abode of the fallen angels from Genesis 6:1-8 – those who mated with human women and produced an offspring called the “Nephilim” mostly translated as “giants” and called “the mighty men who were of old, the men of renown.”

The Lake of Fire is the final destination of all the lost (the “wicked dead”). It is sometimes debated whether or not it exists yet and if it may be created after the destruction of the old heavens and earth and the creation of the new, but Revelation 19:20 tells us the Antichrist and the False Prophet are thrown into the Lake of Fire at the end of the Tribulation which would be before the Millennium. That suggests it exists now. The rest of the lost will join them there after the Last Judgment and for all eternity after.

The Abyss will be the holding pen for Satan during the Millennium (Kingdom Age), at the end of which, he will be released for one last round of his mischief (Gog Revolution), after which he goes into the Lake of Fire forever.

The Great Gulf Fixed (or Chasm) is an uncrossable gap or gulf that divides Hell (Hades), where the wicked dead are now, and Paradise where the Old Testament Believers were before Christ’s resurrection.

Hell or Hades (Torments) is the place where the lost go. It is a temporary holding place until the Last Judgment at the end of the Millennium when its occupants will be judged for their “works” (human good) which will be found

wanting against those of Christ. They will then be transferred to the Lake of Fire forever.

Paradise, as the name suggests, is NOT a place of torment, nor is it Purgatory. Because sin had not then been judged, all OT believers went temporarily to Paradise to await the judgment of (all) sins to make them righteous for entrance into Heaven.

John 3:13 No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.

In John, Jesus tells us that, as of that time which was before the Cross, none but He had ascended into Heaven. In Luke 23:43 Jesus told the penitent thief, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.” With sin judged at the Cross, at the resurrection of our Lord, all those in Paradise, all its previous OT occupants, have been taken to Heaven. Paradise is empty now and has been since the resurrection of our Lord. All NT believers go immediately to Heaven today and are “face to face with the Lord”.

Eph 4:9 In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.

1 Peter 3:18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, ¹⁹ in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, ²⁰ because they formerly did not obey, when God’s patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water.

This is a picture of Jesus descending into the Underworld and announcing the strategic victory of the Cross. As suggested by the context, the “spirits” referred to in 1 Peter 3:20 are probably the souls of the evil human race that existed in the days of Noah. Those “spirits” are now “in prison” awaiting the final judgment of God at the end of the Age.

In Luke, we see a pretty good picture of Paradise (also called “Abraham’s Bosom”), Hell, and the gulf that divides the two compartments.

Luke 16:19 “There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. ²⁰ But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, ²¹ desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table. Moreover, the dogs came and licked his sores. ²² So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³ And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

²⁴ “Then he cried and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.’ ²⁵ But Abraham said, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. ²⁶ And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.’

²⁷ “Then he said, ‘I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father’s house, ²⁸ for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.’ ²⁹ Abraham said to him, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.’ ³⁰ And he said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ ³¹ But he said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.’ ”

Lazarus and the rich man find themselves dead and in the Underworld. The rich man is in Torments and Lazarus is in Paradise with Father Abraham. The rich man cries out across the great gulf for mercy and asks Abraham to just “dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.” Torments is how we picture Hell.

Abraham replies that is not possible because of the “great gulf fixed” between them (some translations translate as “chasm”), “so that those who

want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.” Paradise and Torments house two entirely different sets of people – Paradise is for the saved, and Torments is for the lost. And neither can cross over the great chasm to the other side.

The rich man then asks Abraham to send Lazarus back from the dead to his five brothers and warn them lest they also end up in Torments. Abraham replies that his brothers have Moses and the prophets to warn them, and if they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, “neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.”

This story was told by Jesus during the Age of the Law (or the Age of Israel) and before the Cross. Paradise was the place OT believers went before Heaven was opened to them. Paradise is empty now. Torments, however, remains occupied by the lost and will remain so until they are judged for their “works,” at the Last Judgment at the end of the Millennium. They will NOT be judged for their sins. The sins of the world were judged at the Cross, and Christ was judged for those sins in our place. The “works” (human good) of those who rejected the grace provisions for their salvation through the work of Christ on the Cross will be found wanting when compared to the perfect righteousness of Christ. They will then be will be sentenced to the Lake of Fire forever.

This is why Jacob, in his deep mourning over the “death” of Joseph, said, “I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning.” So deep was his grief, that he expected to eventually die with it still tormenting his soul, but in Paradise, he would be joyfully reunited with Joseph.

THE UNDERWORLD

Drawn By Clarence Larkin

