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The descendants of Esau. Jesus crucified.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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Transcript

Genesis 36. These are the generations of Esau, that is, Edom. Esau took his wives from the Canaanites, Adah the daughter of Elon the Hittite, Aholabamah the daughter of Anna the daughter of Zibion the Hivite, and Basimath Ishmael's daughter, the sister of Nebaoth.

Nadah bore to Esau Eliphaz, Basimath bore Ruhl, and Aholabamah bore Jeosh, Jalum, and Korah. These are the sons of Esau who were born to him in the land of Canaan. 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, for their possessions were too great for them to dwell together. The land of their sojournings could not support them because of their livestock. So Esau settled in the hill country of Seir.

Esau is Edom. These are the generations of Esau, the father of the Edomites, in the hill country of Seir. These are the names of Esau's sons.

Eliphaz, the son of Adah, the wife of Esau. Ruhl, the son of Basimath, the wife of Esau. The sons of Eliphaz were Teman, Omer, Zepho, Gatham, and Kenaz.

Timnah was a concubine of Eliphaz, Esau's son. She bore Amalek to Eliphaz. These are the sons of Adah, Esau's wife.

These are the sons of Ruhl, Nahath, Zerah, Shammah, and Mizar. These are the chiefs of Ruhl in the land of Edom. These are the sons of Basimath, Esau's wife.

These are the sons of Aholobamah, Esau's wife. The chiefs Jeosh, Jalam, and Korah. These are the chiefs born of Aholobamah, the daughter of Anna, Esau's wife.

These are the sons of Esau, that is Edom, and these are their chiefs. These are the sons of Seir the Horite, inhabitants of the land, Lotam, Shobal, Zibion, Anna, Dishon, Ezer, and Dishon. These are the chiefs of the Horites, the sons of Seir in the land of Edom.

The sons of Lotan were Hori and Heman, and Lotan's sister was Timnah. These are the sons of Shobal, Alvin, Manahath, Ebal, Shefo, and Onam. These are the sons of Zibion, Eir, and Anna.

He is the Anna who found the hot springs in the wilderness as he pastured the donkeys of Zibion his father. These are the children of Anna, Dishon, and Aholobamah, the daughter of Anna. These are the sons of Dishon, Hemdan, Heshban, Ithran, and Cheran.

These are the sons of Ezer, Bilhan, Zehvan, and Akhan. These are the sons of Dishan, Uz, and Aran. These are the chiefs of the Horites, the chiefs Lotan, Shobal, Zibion, Anna, Dishon, Ezer, and Dishan.

These are the chiefs of the Horites, chief by chief, in the land of Seir. These are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom. Before any king reigned over the Israelites, Bela the son of Beor reigned in Edom, the name of his city being Dinhabab.

Bela died, and Jobab the son of Zerah of Bozroh reigned in his place. Jobab died, and Husham of the land of the Temanites reigned in his place. Husham died, and Hedad the son of Bedad, who defeated Midian in the country of Moab, reigned in his place, the name of his city being Abith.

Hedad died, and Samla of Masraqah reigned in his place. Samla died, and Shul of Rehoboth of the Euphrates reigned in his place. Shul died, and Baal-hanin the son of Akbor reigned in his place.

Baal-hanin the son of Akbor died, and Hedar reigned in his place, the name of his city being Powel. His wife's name was Mehetabel, the daughter of Metrud, daughter of

Mezahab. These are the names of the chiefs of Esau, according to their clans and their dwelling places, by their names.

The chiefs Timna, Alva, Jetheth, Aholabama, Ela, Pinan, Kenaz, Timan, Mibzar, 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. In Genesis chapter 36 we have a chapter filled with what might perhaps be surprising material, yet we've already seen the pattern of a father dying followed by the genealogy of his firstborn son, who was not the favoured son, and then followed by a longer textual treatment of the other son.

So we see it in the case of Abraham dying, and then Ishmael's genealogy is given, followed by the story of Jacob. Here we have a similar pattern. Esau is connected with Edom here, as he was earlier on in chapter 25.

That name, Red, was given to him in the context of his selling of the birthright for the red stew. As we get through this chapter we'll see that Esau seems to get to everything first. He gets to kings and chiefs before Israel does, although his kings seem to be different from the kings that we see in the land of Israel.

The genealogy here is a bit complicated by the fact that it isn't just one list of names, rather the lineage seems to be functioning in different spheres, and there's also the descendants of the Horites that are listed. So we have a list of sons, followed by a list of chiefs, then we have a list of sons of Seir the Horite, followed by a list of chiefs of the Horites, then we have the list of kings who reigned in the land of Edom, and then we have the name of the chiefs of Esau. So it's sons, chiefs, sons, chiefs, kings, chiefs.

So there's a literary pattern here, and also we can notice that this goes on quite some way into the future. Bel-Hanan is king at the same time as David, and Hedar, or Hedad as he's called within First Kings, is a king who becomes a trouble to Israel at the time of Solomon. This suggests that this part of the text was inserted in at the time of Solomon, or maybe later.

There are a few books of scripture where there is a long period of time that seems to intervene between the first writing of some of the texts that are involved in them to the final compilation of the finished book. We can see that in something like the book of Psalms or Proverbs quite obviously, but also in other parts of scripture that the bulk of the book was written and then later things were added at key points. As I will highlight in a moment though, these insertions are, I believe, important, and they help us better to understand the meaning of the text.

They are not to be seen as uninspired, certainly not. Rather they connect the meaning of the text and the import, the direction it's pointing to events many, many years down the line from that which is originally referred to. There are parallels to be observed between Esau and his brother.

We can think about the way in which Esau prospers in the land, and the way that that's described is similar to the way that Jacob's prospering is described within the land of Laban in chapter 31 verse 18. Jacob prospers in the land of Laban and then moves back into the promised land, whereas for Esau it's a movement in the other direction. He prospers in the land and then moves out to the land of Edom.

Esau leaving the land is also a parting of ways that is similar to the parting of ways between Abram and Lot in chapter 13 verse 6. The land now belongs to Jacob. Throughout the story of Genesis we have a number of other characters whose identities play off against those of the promised people. We can think about Lot and Abram.

There's a sort of diptych between the two of them, two frames that parallel the characters and contrast them. The characters of Ishmael and Isaac are also paralleled in such a way. Cain and Abel earlier on within the story.

And here Esau and Jacob play off against each other. And the nations that arise from them will have a similar sort of relationship. When you think about brothers, brothers can play off against each other's identities and have rivalries and we see some sort of rivalry or tension between characters such as Abram and Lot in the nations that descend from them, Moab and Ammon, and then Israel.

But we also see it in the story of Esau and Jacob and Edom and Israel. But that relationship is closer. They're not just brothers, they are twins.

And twins, their identity are entangled or connected far more closely than in the case of mere brothers. So Israel's story and Edom's story are connected in sometimes surreal ways. There are close parallels.

And the more that we look at these two characters, the more we'll see that Israel is supposed to see itself in Edom, to internalize certain aspects of Edom, but also to remain distinct from and separate from Edom. That rivalry that the ancestors have, Esau and Jacob, is going to be expressed in various ways in their descendants with this other kingdom that's very close and at certain points becomes part of the kingdom of Israel itself. In the story of David, where David takes over the land of Edom and he in himself takes on characters of Esau, note that David is the only other character in scripture apart from Esau who's described as ruddy.

And then at other points he seems to be like Esau. He's the one who comes with 400 men to attack Nabal. Now Nabal is Laban backwards but Abigail sends a wave of gifts ahead and pacifies him.

So there are relationships between David and Esau and then between the two nations of Edom and Israel. I'll get into that bit more in a moment. Esau seems to have conquered the land of Seir and intermarried with the Horites.

There's a merging of peoples here. Notice the presence of Anna and Zibion, the fathers of his two Canaanite wives. Timna becomes a concubine of Eliphaz, Esau's son, which suggests a reduction in status that the Horites have been subdued by this greater people.

Now once again we need to remember that Esau and Jacob, Isaac, Abraham, they're not just small groups of people. They are large sheikdoms. They're surrounded with many men and women and they're supporting great people groups that are wandering around with them.

Esau comes with 400 fighting men to meet Jacob. Even back in chapter 14, Abraham had 318 fighting men and was able to drive away kings. Now this suggests that these were powerful sheikdoms and that both Esau and Jacob were able to command significant influence within their regions.

The reference to chiefs and kings underlines this fact that these are political entities. That Esau is Edom, the nation, the political entity, and Jacob is Israel, once again a political entity. Edom is based below Israel, towards the southeast, and their patterns of stories are often very similar.

However Esau seems to reach some of the landmarks before Israel. They have kings before Israel. Their kings don't seem to be dynastic rulers, rather there may be chiefs set above the rest of the people.

They come from different cities. They are not descended from each other. But there are similarities.

So for instance there is Saul of Rehoboth or Shul as it's written within the text here but it's the same word as Saul. And this Edomite king was king at the same time as Israel chose Saul. When Israel says let us have a king like those of the nations, they end up with a king called Saul.

A king that has the same name as the king of their twin nation, Edom, down south. It might be interesting to consider why we're reading about kings at this particular point in the story. In the previous chapter Benjamin has been born immediately after Jacob is promised that kings will come from his loins.

Now that promise is one that is fulfilled with the first king, a Benjamite, Saul. And there seem to be a number of connections between Benjamin, Saul, and Edom or who was the first king of the Edomites? Bela son of Beel. Who was the first son of Benjamin? Bela.

There seems to be a connection there. We read about someone looking after his father's donkeys and finding a spring. In the story of 1st Samuel it's while looking for his father's donkeys and coming to a well that Saul is led to become the king, to be selected as the one who will take the rule of Israel.

And Saul himself takes on the character of Esau. We could maybe call him Esau. He's someone who despises his birthright.

There are a number of scenes within the story of Saul where he's playing out the pattern of Esau. There is the story of him in the darkness of the cave and then again in the darkness of his sleep with the items taken from above his head. Is that your voice David my son? Playing out the story of the lost blessing.

And then what is his response? He lifts up his voice and weeps. The response that Esau had after he found that he had lost the blessing. And these stories are playing out against the backdrop of Genesis and in a way that connects the character of Saul, the Benjamite, with Esau.

And so Israel's identity is always playing off its twin. Maybe this is why there is so much attention given to the genealogy of Edom in this place. We can see further parallels between Edom and Israel in stories such as that of Hadar or Hadad.

If you look in 1 Chronicles 1.50 you'll see him described as Hadad. If Hadad is the of 1 Kings chapter 11 then he is someone who goes through the experience of Israel. Joab tries to kill the baby boys of the land of Edom as David takes over that land.

Hadad is brought down to Egypt where he marries and settles and then he comes back to Edom at a later point and causes trouble for Solomon. This is a similar pattern to Israel's experience under Pharaoh and its return to the land. So Saul ends up taking on the character of Esau and also some of the Edomites end up taking on the character of Israel.

The character of Amalek in particular is mentioned within this chapter as Amalek was the great rival, the brother that sought to destroy them as they came out of And the struggle with the Amalekites is one that plays out throughout the rest of scripture in various ways. We see it in the story of the Exodus. We see it in the story of Saul.

Indeed Saul's failure, the reason why he loses the kingdom, is in part his failure to deal with the Amalekites. Later on in the story of Esther we see that Haman is an Agagite and Esther and Mordecai are Benjamites. They have to again, the Benjamites have to deal with the Amalekites.

In the New Testament we have another Edomite character in Herod, the Idumean, and in his opposition to Christ and John the Baptist we may be seeing more of this old rivalry of the twins playing out. A question to reflect upon. A number of the characters mentioned here have tantalizing connections to other characters in scripture.

We read of Bela, the son of Beor. Is that the same person as Balaam, the son of Beor? Is he connected with Balaam in some way? We don't know. Again, some people have seen in the character of Jobab the historical character of Job.

At the very least it would seem that Job is connected with the land of Edom. In Lamentations chapter 4 verse 21, Edom and the land of Uz are connected together. What other clues within this passage might connect the story of Job with the land of Edom? John chapter 19 verses 1 to 37.

Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged him and the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head and arrayed him in a purple robe. They came up to him saying, Hail king of the Jews and struck him with their hands. Pilate went out again and said to them, See, I am bringing him out to you that you may know that I find no guilt in him.

So Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, Behold the man. When the chief priests and the officers saw him they cried out, Crucify him, crucify him.

Pilate said to them, Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no guilt in him. The Jews answered him, We have a law and according to that law he ought to die because he has made himself the son of God. When Pilate heard this statement he was even more afraid.

He entered his headquarters again and said to Jesus, Where are you from? But Jesus gave him no answer. So Pilate said to him, You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you? Jesus answered him, You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin.

From then on Pilate sought to release him. But the Jews cried out, If you release this man you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar.

So when Pilate heard these words he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called the stone pavement and in Aramaic, Gabbatha. Now it was the day of preparation of the Passover. It was about the sixth hour.

He said to the Jews, Behold your king! They cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate said to them, Shall I crucify your king? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar. So he delivered him over to them to be crucified.

So they took Jesus and he went out bearing his own cross to the place called the place of a skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side and Jesus between them. Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross.

It read, Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews. Many of the Jews read this inscription for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city and it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek. So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, Do not write the king of

the Jews, but rather this man said, I am king of the Jews.

Pilate answered, What I have written, I have written. When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier, also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom.

So they said to one another, Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be. This was to fulfill the scripture which says, They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots. So the soldiers did these things.

But standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister Mary, the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, Woman, behold your son. Then he said to the disciple, Behold your mother.

And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home. After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said to fulfill the scripture, I thirst. A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth.

When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, It is finished. And he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. Since it was the day of preparation, and so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath, for that Sabbath was a high day, the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away.

So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water.

He who saw it has borne witness. His testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth, that you also may believe. For these things took place that the scripture might be fulfilled.

Not one of his bones will be broken. And again another scripture says, They will look on him whom they have pierced. John chapter 19 begins with a sort of mock coronation.

Jesus is dressed up with a crown of thorns and a purple robe, and the soldiers greet him saying, Hail King of the Jews. The purpose of all of this was probably more public shaming than causing the most extreme pain. Pilate seems to have hoped that a public humiliation of Jesus before the crowd would satisfy the murderous desire of the mob, give them some sort of catharsis, and save him from actually having to go through with an execution.

Once again John probably wants us to see the irony of the situation though. The soldiers

are performing a mock coronation, but Jesus really is being prepared for the glorification of the cross. The crown of thorns that he wears is reminiscent of the thorns of the curse of Genesis chapter 3, as many have noted.

Upon the brow, again a site where the curse was placed. Pilate's ploy fails as the people insist upon crucifixion. He presents Jesus using the words, Behold the man.

And again this is presumably a mock royal acclamation. This is the guy, this is the man that you want to lead you. Once again John however wants us to see the irony, that this is truly the one being prepared for the glorification of the cross.

Pilate tells them to crucify Jesus themselves, as he sees no fault in Jesus. Yet the Jews insist they have no authority to crucify Jesus themselves, but they claim Jesus has claimed to be the son of God, and so he must be put to death according to our law, and they challenge Pilate again. Pilate returns to speak to Jesus and points out to him, maybe somewhat frustratedly or angrily, that he has the authority to put him to death and he should speak for himself.

Jesus claims however that Pilate's authority comes from God alone. He would have no authority to do anything were it not for the fact that God had given him that authority. Once again we're reminded that this is the day of preparation.

Jesus is the Passover lamb. In Isaiah chapter 53 we're told that the servant would be like a sheep, silent before its shearers, and the fact that Jesus does not present a case for himself again would remind us of that. That Jesus is the Passover lamb, he's the one who's the servant of God, he's the one who fulfills and brings together those roles.

The Jews manipulated Pilate, claiming that he was no friend of Caesar if he allowed Jesus to live, and so in the end he hands Jesus over to them. Who is being referred to in this statement? Well it would seem to be the Jews on the surface of it grammatically, but yet when we look at the crucifixion it's supervised by Roman soldiers. So it seems as if part of that ambiguity is the point, that the Jews actually have their way with Jesus.

It's not primarily Roman instigation of the crucifixion, rather it's the Jewish instigation of this event. Again these are the Judean leaders, the leaders of the people who are leading the people into judgment, and there's again an irony that they claim we have no king but Caesar. They disavow the Messiah and they present themselves as the servants of Caesar.

There's a tragic irony there, they give themselves over to his control. Throughout the passage Jesus is presented as being in control rather than just a victim. He bears his own cross.

The title above the cross is written in Hebrew, Greek and Latin, suggesting the worldwide significance of Christ's work and rule. We might notice that two other words are

translated in this passage, suggesting again that there is an audience beyond the immediate Jewish audience here. The title was presumably the charge that led to Jesus' crucifixion, king of the Jews.

However as in many places in John there is rich irony here, for Jesus is indeed the king of the Jews and though the chief priests object the title over Jesus, Pilate's word is treated as final, like the scripture that is ironically fulfilling. And Pilate is probably designing this in part to spite the Jewish leaders. They want to reject and to kill this man but he is connecting this man to them by claiming that he is their king.

Various scriptures are fulfilled in the crucifixion and afterwards and there are many other scriptures that are playing in the background such as the reference to Isaiah 53 and other parts like that. We can think of references to Psalm 69 in the thirst of Christ, in Psalm 22 15 18, Exodus 12 46 with the reference to the bones not being broken, Zechariah 12 verse 10, Isaiah 53 9 and all of these verses highlight the fact that this is happening according to the scripture, that Christ is playing out all these themes of the biblical text. He's fulfilling prophecy.

This is what ought to have taken place. Now it may seem that everything has gone wrong but at this time when everything seems to be going wrong we get this litany of fulfilled scripture that highlights that this is no accident. Step by step this is fulfilling what God has declared in the past.

This is intended by Christ. Christ is actually carrying out the mission that was set for him here. He's not rejecting or swerving from it nor has he stumbled and fallen.

This is exactly what God had always intended. The appearance of Jesus' mother again at this point is probably significant. John never speaks about the virgin birth it would seem but birth is a constant theme of his gospel.

Chapter 16 verse 21 speaks of the cross as if it were a birth. A woman with birth pangs, her hour come and struggling to give birth to a child and then rejoicing that a child is born into the world. The death of Jesus is like Israel giving birth and it's also accompanied by the giving of a new son to his mother and this son is the beloved disciple, the archetypal disciple.

The womb of Israel is being opened and the firstborn delivers his brethren into the arms of his mother. Christ gives the beloved disciple and his mother to each other much as we are given to each other by Christ in his church. When we speak about the motherhood of Mary our focus tends to be upon her physical role in the incarnation and the conception of Jesus and his birth in Bethlehem and the physical dimension of this is obviously important but the biblical text here particularly seems to focus upon the spiritual and the symbolic role that Mary is playing.

The mere physical act of bearing and nursing Jesus is not the great thing rather the spiritual act of hearing God's word and keeping it, bearing Christ within her as the archetypal disciple is the most important thing. Mary's bearing of Christ is presented as a fuller realization of that great act of faith. Mary is described in Luke chapter 1 verse 45 as she who believed and her physical bearing of Christ is fundamentally seen as a spiritual act, one in which the spirit comes upon and empowers her.

Mary's physical bearing of Christ is not highlighted in John's gospel but in passages such as this one the spiritual and symbolic aspect of it really is. Mary's motherhood here is not according to the flesh but is a stronger sort of fictive kinship of the spirit formed by the gift of Christ. What we see Christ doing here is forming a new family at the foot of his cross.

At this point Christ can declare that it is finished, that he has completed what he intended to do, an intention seen most clearly in the bringing together of the beloved disciple and his mother. Jesus hands over the spirit in verse 30. Even his very moment of death seems to occur on his terms.

John chapter 7 verse 39 speaks of the spirit being given over when Jesus was glorified. The lifting up of Jesus on the cross is the first stage of his glorification for John. So appropriately there is a handing over of the spirit at this point, presumably to the new family that's been formed at the foot of the cross.

Blood and water then come out from Jesus' pierced side and there's such an emphasis upon this. The witness born to this event is stressed, the truth of it, that this did occur. The person who saw it bore faithful witness and this is written in order that you might believe.

Once again these are details that matter and they're underlined for that reason. Some have related the piercing of the side to the formation of Eve from the side of Adam. That's part of the symbolism I suspect.

Perhaps we should also see birth imagery here. Jesus is the belly or the womb from which the living waters flow. Blood and water might also relate to the blood of the covenant and the water of baptism.

Finally Jesus has also spoken of his body as the temple as in Ezekiel 47. Water that will heal and give life to the nations flows out from the temple and the torn body of Jesus might be related to the torn temple veil of the other gospel accounts. As we get further on within John's gospel I think we'll see an allusion to these passages from Ezekiel.

So I think it's natural to see it as the waters flowing out from the temple to give life to the world. As in chapter 1 verse 29 Jesus is related to the Passover lamb. His bones are not broken in fulfillment of the law concerning the Passover lamb and Zechariah chapter

12 from which the verse quoted in verse 37 comes speaks of repentance given to Israel through the gift of the spirit.

This also serves as the fulfillment of Jesus being lifted up for all of the nations to look at as a sign that brings healing. A question to reflect upon. John emphasises Christ's fulfilling of scripture throughout the crucifixion account.

Can you collect the various references to the scripture that are found in this account? Go back to the original contexts and see how the broader context of those passages shed light upon the meaning of the crucifixion and what Christ is accomplishing.