

**SOVEREIGN GRACE...**  
**BLESSES THE WICKED FOR A TIME**  
**Genesis 36: 1-43**

*Please review this week's catechism question.*

**INTRODUCTION**

Describe a time you felt that a “bad” person was treated well while a “good” person was treated poorly. Who are some “bad” people you know that seem to be prospering in spite of the evil they do?

What is the complaint of the psalmist in Psalm 73: 12-14?

*He is wondering why it is that the wicked prosper while he, a person who has sought God and lived a righteous life is suffering.*

Are you often troubled by the apparent “prosperity” of “wicked” people, especially when you or others who you consider “righteous” seem to suffer so much? Why or why not?

Genesis 36 stands as a testimony to God's kindness to wicked people. It is as though God is going out of his way to make plain how kind he is to godless individuals. Especially in the context of Genesis, this chapter sounds a discordant note. It is as though God, in this record of Esau's success, is challenging us to consider his ways with men. He is putting the problem right in front of us so that we have to deal with it. This chapter does not contain the full answer to the problem but it forces the question upon us. **Why is God kind to the wicked? Or to put it another way, why do the wicked prosper?**

**STUDY**

**Esau is wicked.**

1. What evidence of Esau's wickedness do we find in vv. 2-3? Compare with Genesis 15:12-21 (esp. 16 & 21), 24:1-4, 28:6-9 & Deut. 7:1-4.

*Esau took his wives from the women of Canaan. He grew up in a home where he was told his entire life that the day was coming when the descendants of Abraham would destroy the Canaanites and take over their land. He was told that the reason that God was going to do this was the perversity and idolatry of the Canaanite people. He knew the Canaanites were evil, the enemies of God. He knew the marvelous story of how his grandfather, Abraham, had sent his most trusted servant back to Paddan-Aram, to his kinsmen to find Rebekah, his mother to be the wife of Isaac. He was fully aware that it was not God's will for him to marry Canaanite women. However, he didn't care what God wanted, he only cared about what he wanted and he wanted to marry these women and so he did. Esau's wickedness is greater because he knew better.*

2. What evidence of Esau's wickedness do we find in vv. 6-8? Compare with Genesis 12:7 & 13:8-13.

*Esau moved his entire household out of the land of Canaan to the land of Seir. Seir is south and east of Canaan. The author of Genesis has worded these two verses very carefully to draw our attention to another man who packed up his family and property and left the land of Canaan with disastrous results. If you'll remember, in Genesis 13, Abraham's nephew Lot also moved east and south of the land of Canaan because there wasn't enough room for his livestock and Abraham's livestock. He moved to Sodom and Gomorrah, those wicked cities that God destroyed with fire because of the depth of their depravity. Lot abandoned the safety of God's promises to embrace the comforts of this world and suffered serious consequences. We are to see in Esau's move a repetition of the foolish and faithless Lot.*

3. Read Genesis 25: 19-34 and Hebrews 12:16-17. What is the chief evidence of Esau's wickedness?

*When we first read this little story of Jacob cheating his brother out of his birthright Esau appears stupid but not wicked, while Jacob appears smart but wicked. However, we have at the end of the story God's assessment of who is the wicked one in the story and it is Esau. Most of the time in the book of Genesis God does not give his assessment of the behavior of people directly, as he does here. The reason he does it here is because it is counter intuitive to how we would naturally read the*

story. This word “despise” is regularly used in the OT to describe people despising God. Clearly, it is a disobedient and wicked thing for Esau to sell his birthright.

Why is it so bad? The sale of his birthright is so evil because he’s not just selling his inheritance of material possessions. He is selling the promises of God. He is showing that a bowl of soup means more to him than having God bless him, make his name great and make him a blessing to the nations. In short, he believes that a bowl of soup is more certain to make him happy than the God who made the universe. Esau has no faith, no love for God and no interest in the things of God. He’s only interested in the things of this world. That is why the writer to the Hebrews uses him as a warning for us. “See that no one is sexually immoral or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son.” Esau is godless because he believes soup is more necessary to life than God.

### **God is kind.**

4. Read through Genesis 36 and make a list of all the ways God blessed Esau. Consider how he met Jacob in Genesis 32:6 & 33:1-16 and what Moses says about Edom in Deut. 2:12.

- Esau becomes a nation, Edom. This is stated 4 times in the chapter.
- He has fifteen sons and grandsons
- All of his sons and grandsons become tribal leaders, chiefs.
- He is very wealthy
- He intermarries with the tribal leaders of the people who live in Seir. His wife Oholibamath is the daughter of one of the chieftans.
- According to Moses he and/or his descendants wipe out the Horites and take over the land completely.
- According to v.31, descendants of Esau were kings in Edom long before there were any Israelite kings. In fact, if you think about the chronology of the OT, Edom was enjoying nationhood and powerful kings during the time that Israel was enslaved in Egypt.
- If you’ll remember chapter 33, Esau met Jacob as he returned to the land of Canaan with 400 mounted men. It’s a pathetic picture. Jacob with his motley assortment of sheep and other livestock being driven by a ragtag bunch of nomads, met by 400 powerful warriors mounted on fierce warhorses. The contrast is stark. God has

blessed Esau in incredible ways in spite of the fact that Esau despises the Lord.

However, there is a kindness greater than the material blessings that God gave to Esau that is not recorded in this chapter. He is the grandson of Abraham and the son of Isaac. He grew up in a home where the living God was known and worshipped. He grew up hearing the promises of God and observing his parents and grandparents living by faith. He was the recipient of revelation from God that was not available to those outside of Abraham’s family. He was present when his father built altars and offered sacrifices for sin and worshipped Yahweh, the only and true God.

5. How should Esau respond to the enormous amount of kindness God has showered upon him (See Rom. 2:4)?

Every human ought to at all times and in every way live in a state of gratitude to God and love for him because of the enormous kindness we have experienced. Esau, every person who has the opportunity to hear the word of God taught, who has a Bible to read and every child of Christian parents ought to live in the fear of God and the joy of knowing his will. Taking life for granted is a great sin. Being indifferent to or even hostile towards the God who gives you all things to enjoy is great wickedness.

6. How are you responding to the many ways that God cares for you? How are you responding to being part of a community where you regularly hear God’s word taught and you live in a country where you can freely worship and read God’s word?

### **God’s present kindness does not mean he doesn’t care about wickedness**

7. Read Psalm 50: 16-22. How are the wicked described?

They recite God’s laws and take his covenant on their lips. In other words they believe that God is pleased with them. They believe that God loves them and has promised them a happy future. At the very same time they profess that God is pleased with them, they hate his instructions and ignore the laws they recite. They steal, commit

*adultery, curse, lie and slander even their family members. As the psalmist says, as long as our lives are not disturbed we think that God likes what we like. We assume that because God is not confronting us that he approves of us. This is how Esau lived his life. He knew God's promises and he was living a happy and comfortable life so why should he worry about God? God had to be pleased with him because God was blessing him.*

**8.** How will God respond to them (See Isaiah 34: 5-10 for a description of what eventually happened to Edom.)?

*He is storing up wrath against them. He is taking account of their sins and is planning a day of punishment for them. He is going to punish Edom for their sins eventually. He is not letting them get away with anything.*

### **Why is God so kind to wicked people like Esau?**

**9.** Read Jeremiah 5:7-9. What is the final outcome of God's immense kindness to Israel (I supplied all their needs.) and Israel's ongoing rebellion?

*The justice of God in the destruction of wicked Israel shines forth. It is absolutely clear that God must destroy Israel. There is no other just and legitimate course of action (Should I not punish them for this?). The kindness of God in the face of the ongoing wickedness of human beings merely serves to magnify the justice of God in their condemnation. When God sends sinners to hell, the universe will bear witness to the fact that God is only doing what is just and right and fair. His enormous kindness exposes the guilt and culpability of sinners who receive his kindness but do not respond to it. It is the persistent rebellion of humans in the face of such enormous kindness that is the foundation of God's just condemnation of sinners to an eternal hell. God is right to be angry and his right to exercise judgment upon rebellious humanity is everywhere in the Bible. See Romans 1: 17-25 for another statement of this reality.*

**10.** Have you ever been kind to someone only to have them repay your kindness with meanness? How does that make you feel? What should happen to people who repay kindness with meanness?

**11.** Would you want to live in a world where God didn't care if people repaid kindness with meanness? Why or why not?

**God is kind to the wicked to increase their guilt and so magnify his justice in their destruction.**

**12.** Read 1 Timothy 1: 12-17. How does Paul describe himself?

*He was blasphemer, a persecutor and a violent man. He was ignorant and unbelieving. He is the worst of sinners.*

**13.** What did God do to/for him?

*God considered him faithful. God appointed him to his service. God showed him mercy. God poured out the grace of the Lord Jesus upon him and he poured out faith and love upon him. He saved Paul.*

**14.** How does Paul feel about what God did?

*He feels grateful and he worships and honors God for his mercy. He is full of joy in God and his salvation and he praises him for his infinite mercy.*

**15.** According to v. 16, why was he, the worst of sinners, forgiven?

*This happened so that everyone who trusts in Christ will be certain that the grace and mercy of God in Christ is sufficient to forgive them, to save them. God poured out kindness on such a wicked person like Paul so that the greatness of his love and mercy could be clearly seen and loved.*

**16.** How do you respond to the daily grace that God pours out on you?

**17.** How do you feel about Christ dying for your sins and about the Holy Spirit giving you faith in Christ and love for God?

**God is kind to the wicked to magnify his grace**