

The Wives and Sons of Esau

36: 1-8

This is the account of Esau and what became of him, namely the nation of Edom. The name Edom signifies three different things in this chapter. First, it is used of the person of Esav (36:1); second, the inhabitants of Seir are called by the title Edom (36:9) and, finally, the territory itself is described as the land of Edom (36:31).

At the close of Chapter 35, we were presented with a list of the sons of Jacob (35:22-26). They were catalogued according to their mothers. The same method is now used to record the sons of Esau.⁵⁴⁴ The author says: Esau took his wives from the women of Canaan. His first wife was Adah, daughter of Elon the Hittite. She was called Basemath earlier in 26:34. His second wife from Canaan was Oholibamah, daughter of her father Anah and the granddaughter of Zibeon the Hivite (36:2). She was called Judith earlier in 26:34.

Esav also took a third wife, Basemath, daughter of Ishmael and sister of Nebaioth (36:3). She was called Mahalath earlier in 28:9. The names of Esau's three wives differ here from those given in the previous accounts. This difference came about when Moses used genealogical documents from Esau's family and tribe, and inserted them without alteration. This difference can be explained by the ancient custom in the East, of giving surnames, as the Arabs frequently still do, founded upon some important or memorable event in a person's life. Slowly, the new name becomes the one that is more frequently used. For example, Esau's name became Edom (25:30). As a rule the women received new names when they were married.⁵⁴⁵

Then we are told about the sons of Esau. Adah bore Eliphaz to Esau, Basemath bore Reuel, and Oholibamah bore Jeush, Jalam and Korah. These were the five sons of Esau, who were born to him in Canaan. It is ironic that Esau's sons were born in the Promised Land, and except for Benjamin, Jacob's sons were born outside the Land. Then we are told of Esav's departure from Canaan. Although Esau is outside the covenant promise of God, the blessing extends to him in two ways: his children (36:4-5) and his prosperity (36:6-7).⁵⁴⁶

Esau took his blessing that he had received from Isaac (27:39-40), his wives and sons and an untold number of daughters and all the members of his household, as well as his livestock and all his other animals and all the goods he had acquired in Canaan, and

moved to a land some distance from his brother Jacob (36:6). Therefore, just after Ya'akov left for Haran, Esau surrenders the land of Canaan to Jacob because at this point in his life, he took the patriarchal blessing quite seriously. He understood that he must find his possessions away from the land of Canaan, and that is what he does. He moved southward into the mountainous regions southwest of the Dead Sea.

Their possessions were too great for them to remain together; the land where they were staying could not support them both because of their livestock (36:7). This is the same issue that separated Abraham and Lot (13:6). There was obviously plenty of land in Canaan, but the problem was that Canaan was comprised of city states. Each city state held a large amount of land around it, so actual neutral space open for grazing was very small. Therefore Esav, like Lot, left for the East and greener pastures.⁵⁴⁷

This summary shows that Esau, who became Edom, settled in the hill country of Seir (36:8). There he subjugated a people called the Horites by force (Deuteronomy 2:12 and 22). But after defeating them, Esau's descendants assimilated them through marriage.