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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. 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.