

Esau & the Edomites

Text: Gen. 36:1-43

Introduction: In this brief lesson, we consider a summary and an overview of this historical record in Genesis 36 with several devotional thoughts along the way.

Concerning Genesis 36, David Sorenson writes, “This chapter gives a genealogical account of Esau’s family, his wives and sons with whom he moved to Seir in verses 1-10; of his sons’ sons, or grandsons, who were dukes in the land of Edom in verse 11-19; after which is inserted a genealogy of Seir the Horite, into whose family Esau married, and of his children, and the dukes among them in verses 20-30. Then follows a list of the kings of Edom in verses 31-39. The chapter ends with a brief narration of the dukes of Esau, according to their families in verses 40-43.”

The record can be neatly divided into seven sections as follows:

I. THE RECORD OF ESAU’S WIVES AND CHILDREN (VS. 1-5)

- Esau is noted as having three wives – two of the daughters of Canaan and one daughter of Ishmael. Their names differ in this record to that of Gen. 26:34 and 28:9. Critics are quick to seize on this but they forget that in the ancient world, it was not at all uncommon for people to be known by two different names.
- It is also noted that his five sons were born to him while he was still in the land of Canaan.
- Question: Why does the Bible include Esau’s genealogy? Why was it important?
 1. Esau was a son of Abraham and while Esau was not chosen to carry on the seed line, God did promise Abraham that he would make a great nation out of him (Gen. 17:20). The record of the multiplication of Esau’s descendants is evidence that God kept His Word.
 2. Records such as these add to the historicity and credibility of the Word of God. They prove conclusively that ancient record keeping was a practice in these early civilizations, contrary to evolutionary and liberal theories that tend to prevail amongst liberal theologians and critics of the Bible. Moses was clearly drawing on these ancient records under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
 3. It is possible that these family records were exchanged at funerals. In the previous chapter Esau and Jacob come together for their father Isaac’s burial so that would be a very natural and logical time for family records to be shared.
 4. It was important that a clear distinction be maintained between the two peoples (Edom and Israel) and these family records would help ensure they did not intermarry and mix.

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II. THE RECORD OF ESAU'S SETTLEMENT IN EDOM (VS. 6-8)

- The reason for Esau moving is noted. The land of Canaan was not able to sustain both he and Jacob with their vast cattle empires.
- Esau moving out of Canaan was a fulfilment of the Divine prophecy to Rebekah that the elder would serve the younger. It also fulfilled the Patriarchal prophecy of Isaac.
- The broader principle is that the man of the flesh and the man of the Spirit cannot work and dwell together. Jacob was a man of faith, a believer in the One True God of Abraham and Isaac. Esau was a profane and fleshly man with no interest in spiritual things.

III. THE RECORD OF ESAU'S DESCENDANTS (VS. 9-14)

- This list contains the grandsons of Esau who were born to his five sons.
- Amalek is mentioned as the son of Eliphaz (likely Esau's firstborn as he was the son of the first wife mentioned in Vs. 2). Amalek was a son of a concubine named Timnah. Amalek is also listed as one of the 'dukes' in verse 16 indicating he became one of the powerful Edomite chieftains.
- Amalek was the father of the Amalekites, a people who while descendants of Esau and related to the Edomites, became such a powerful nation they took on an identity of their own and eventually lived in a separate region to the other Edomites. They would become serious enemies of the people of God and a constant thorn in their sides.
- Amalek, as a direct descendant of Esau, a fleshly man, teaches us some important truths about the battle we have with the flesh.
 1. The reality of Amalek. Amalek doesn't go away! Exodus 17:16 "For he said, Because the LORD hath sworn *that* the LORD *will have* war with Amalek **from generation to generation.**" The old man, the flesh nature, is present with us until we get a new body in heaven.
 2. The battle with Amalek. Amalek were constant enemies of God's people and in like manner, our battle with the flesh is an ongoing one. Galatians 5:17 "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would."
 3. The tactics of Amalek. The Amalekites were sneaky and cunning in the way they would attack. It speaks of the subtilty of the flesh and how it tends to operate in our lives.
 - Exodus 17:8 "**Then** came Amalek, and fought with Israel in Rephidim." When was "then"? Amalek attacked Israel when she was on her way to the promised land, representing the victorious Christian life. Amalek did not make an appearance when the children of Israel were still walking in that early joy of their deliverance from Egypt by the blood of the Lamb but when they had progressed further along in their pilgrimage to Canaan.
 - Deuteronomy 25:17-18 "Remember what Amalek did unto thee by the way, when ye were come forth out of Egypt; How he met

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thee by the way, and smote the hindmost of thee, *even all that were* feeble behind thee, when thou *wast* faint and weary; and he feared not God." Amalek's tactics were dirty. They would attack from the rear when God's people were feeling weak and weary and target the feeble lagging behind. It is when we are weak and weary that we tend to have some of our greatest battles with the enemy within (the flesh). We are also reminded that to lag behind in the Christian walk in spiritual weakness makes us very vulnerable to being taken out by the flesh.

4. The victory over Amalek. God's solution to the problem of the Amalekites was death. Exodus 17:14 "And the LORD said unto Moses, Write this *for* a memorial in a book, and rehearse *it* in the ears of Joshua: for I will **utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.**" God's command to Saul was to completely wipe out the Amalekites (1 Samuel 15). God's solution for the flesh nature is also death. Praise God the old man was crucified at the cross so that we can have victory. Amalek must die! Romans 6:6-7 "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with *him*, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin." See also Galatians 2:20.

IV. THE RECORD OF THE EDMITE DUKES (VS. 15-19)

- The word 'duke' means a "chief or prince". Evidently these were chieftains of various clans within the Edomite kingdom.
- There are 14 'dukes' listed altogether.
- The presence of these 'dukes' is a reminder that the descendants of Esau were a numerous and powerful people.

V. THE RECORD OF THE HORITE CHIEFS (VS. 20-30)

Henry Morris provides a helpful summary in his commentary "The Genesis Record":

- "This section of the "generations of Esau" lists the prominent descendants of Seir, and is included no doubt because of the fact that these people became so closely associated with the descendants of Esau by intermarriage that the two groups finally were one people, the Edomites."
- "The Hurrian patriarch Seir evidently was the pioneer settler of the region. His seven sons became prominent chieftains in the land. In turn they are listed as having nineteen sons of their own."

VI. THE RECORD OF THE EDMITE KINGS (VS. 31-39)

- Appears that over time the position kings developed within the Edomite kingdom.
- It is noted that these kings of Edom predated the kings of Israel (Vs. 31).
- It is also of interest to note that "the Edomite kings never became a family dynasty. When each king died, another unrelated individual

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acceded to the throne, probably by force of arms. Altogether, eight such kings are listed.”

VII. THE RECORD OF THE EDMITE DUKES (VS. 40-43)

Concerning these dukes, Henry Morris notes,

- These last verses of the chapter give the names of the more important dukes, or chieftains, descended from Esau – eleven in all. These names do not seem to be listed chronologically, but geographically.
- It is interesting that most of these “generations of Esau” have been incorporated in the genealogical lists of 1 Chronicles 1:35-54. Not only Moses, but the much later chronicler, considered them important enough to include in the genealogical records of Israel.

Conclusion: Wiersbe writes, “Genesis 36 is a long chapter containing many names, but it’s the end of the story as far as Esau is concerned! The Edomites are named in the Old Testament only because they’re a part of the story of Israel. “Esau” and “Edom”, the avowed enemies of the Jews, are mentioned over 200 times in the Bible (207 by my count), but “Jacob” and “Israel” are found over 2,000 times!”

Remember, watch out for the flesh! Esau is never far away from the man of faith!