

# MOUNTAIN MEN

GENEIS 36:1-43    OCTOBER 12, 2022

There was once a fight in professional wrestling called the King Of The Mountain Match.<sup>1</sup> In it, multiple fighters enter and only advance by scoring a submission on their opponents. Once they have subdued an adversary, a fighter can attempt to *“retrieve...a championship belt and hang it on the hook suspended above the ring with the aid of ladders stationed outside the ring.”*

Esau was a fighter. His grappling days started in the womb when his twin brother tried to get the drop on him. Growing up, he became a skilled hunter. Later, he built himself a militia. In our text tonight, we see him become a powerful ruler whose people go out conquering mountains and men. Edom subdues those who stand in his way and, as a result, he climbs the social ladder. He sits at the top of the hill as champion. But by the time Edom’s story ends, the pages read of defeat, ruin, and doom. He would not submit *himself* to the Lord God of his fathers. He set aside the grace of God, choosing earthly greatness instead of Godliness. And so, ultimately, the champion would be brought down from his high mountain, demolished, and cursed forever.<sup>2</sup>

Let’s consider the rise and fall of this great people, starting in verse 1.

**Genesis 36:1-5 - These are the family records of Esau (that is, Edom).<sup>2</sup> Esau took his wives from the Canaanite women: Adah daughter of Elon the Hethite, Oholibamah daughter of Anah and granddaughter of Zibeon the Hivite,<sup>3</sup> and Basemath daughter of Ishmael and sister of Nebaioth.<sup>4</sup> Adah bore Eliphaz to Esau, Basemath bore Reuel,<sup>5</sup> and Oholibamah bore Jeush, Jalam, and Korah. These were Esau’s sons, who were born to him in the land of Canaan.**

Genesis speaks not only about the importance of marriage but also the importance of *who* you marry. You may recall that Esau’s first wives caused real problems between him and his parents. Marrying a couple of Canaanite ladies was way outside the boundaries of his family culture. Abraham had made it clear that this family was not to marry among the people of the land. But Esau never cared much for his family culture. In disdain for his birthright and marrying these Canaanites, R. Kent Hughes writes, *“he formally trashed his...heritage.”*<sup>3</sup>

But his wives really bothered his parents. And he saw that Isaac signed off on Jacob marrying someone from Rebekah’s family. So Esau got a bright idea: *“I’ll go marry someone from Ishmael’s family.”* You see, Esau was still hoping to get a blessing and so he tried to mimic what Jacob did. Of course, Ishmael was not exactly a beloved figure to Isaac - he was Isaac’s oppressive rival.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King\\_of\\_the\\_Mountain\\_match](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King_of_the_Mountain_match)

<sup>2</sup> Obadiah 4, Malachi 1:4

<sup>3</sup> R. Kent Hughes *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*

<sup>4</sup> *Faithlife Study Bible Notes*

So he's got a couple of Canaanite wives and a token wife.<sup>5</sup> But when his sons start arriving, look what he names them: Reuel means "God is my friend."<sup>6</sup> Eliphaz means "My God is pure gold."<sup>7</sup> Is Esau trying to build a spiritual family, or is this more tokenism? Hebrews calls Esau an unholy, unrepentant man. His decisions are motivated not by a desire for God but by a desire to get things for himself. His next move reveals what his heart is after.

**Genesis 36:6-8 - <sup>6</sup>Esau took his wives, sons, daughters, and all the people of his household, as well as his herds, all his livestock, and all the property he had acquired in Canaan; he went to a land away from his brother Jacob. <sup>7</sup>For their possessions were too many for them to live together, and because of their herds, the land where they stayed could not support them. <sup>8</sup>So Esau (that is, Edom) lived in the mountains of Seir.**

Esau moves his family to the south and east.<sup>8</sup> As we've seen many times before, in Genesis, movements to the east coincide with a move away from God's presence, away from His will, and away from His guardianship.<sup>9</sup>

Esau's choice reminds us of the same one Lot made many years earlier. They both wanted more *stuff*. More space. More herds. Better trappings. Rather than stay in the presence of God with fewer possessions, they walked away from the Lord in pursuit of greater wealth. It's hard for us to fathom Lot or Esau saying, "I want to stay here with you, Abraham," or "you, Jacob," but things like that *did* happen in the Bible. Ruth is an example. She was actually a descendant of Lot. But when the time came to choose, she clung to her Hebrew mother-in-law, forsaking any claim she had to her homeland, and said: "Your people will be my people, your God will be my God." Ruth was content to live as a servant if it meant she could be with the Lord's people and in the Lord's will.

Mephibosheth was a son of David's friend, Jonathan. There came a point where he had a chance to retain a bunch of land and property that was his by right, but he said, "Give it all to *this* guy over here. I just want to be with *you*, King David." And he lived as one of the king's sons and his life was saved as a result.

Esau picked *possessions* instead of *promises*. This would put his life and his lineage on a course that led farther and farther away from God. And that's a course that leads deeper into sin.

He set up camp in the mountains of Seir. The territory of Judah was west of these "dramatic cliffs."<sup>10</sup> Later Jeremiah and Obadiah would describe the Edomites as living like eagles in their nests, high

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<sup>5</sup> There is a discrepancy in the listed names of Esau's wives here and earlier in Genesis 26:34 & 28:9. The issue can be resolved a variety of ways, either with some names being altered in transmission, some wives having more than 1 name (like Jacob/Israel, Esau/Edom), or that Esau had more wives and only certain wives are mentioned in each list. See Derek Kidner, *Genesis*

<sup>6</sup> Bruce Waltke *Genesis: A Commentary*

<sup>7</sup> Kenneth A. Mathews *Genesis 11:27-50:26 The New American Commentary*

<sup>8</sup> Robert Alter *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation With Commentary*

<sup>9</sup> Examples include Cain, the builders of Babel, Lot, and Esau. See Mathews and Karen Armstrong *In The Beginning: A New Interpretation Of Genesis*

<sup>10</sup> Mathews

up in these mountains. This spot was not only fortified, it was also strategically placed along trade routes leading from Arabia and the Red Sea.<sup>11</sup> A man like Esau could do very well there.

At this point, God was still showing grace to Esau. We're told in Joshua 24 that the Lord gave this land to him as a possession. God *loved* Esau. He was not driven out - he still had access to Isaac. He reconciled with Jacob. But, as Bruce Waltke says, Esau was living by sight, not by faith.

**Genesis 36:9-14 - <sup>9</sup>These are the family records of Esau, father of the Edomites in the mountains of Seir. <sup>10</sup>These are the names of Esau's sons: Eliphaz son of Esau's wife Adah, and Reuel son of Esau's wife Basemath. <sup>11</sup>The sons of Eliphaz were Teman, Omar, Zepho, Gatam, and Kenaz. <sup>12</sup>Timna, a concubine of Esau's son Eliphaz, bore Amalek to Eliphaz. These are the sons of Esau's wife Adah. <sup>13</sup>These are Reuel's sons: Nahath, Zerah, Shammah, and Mizzah. These are the sons of Esau's wife Basemath. <sup>14</sup>These are the sons of Esau's wife Oholibamah daughter of Anah and granddaughter of Zibeon: She bore Jeush, Jalam, and Korah to Edom.**

This list of names contains some interesting tidbits. Derek Kidner draws our attention to verse 11 and writes, "*The conjunction of the names Eliphaz and Teman in verse 11 points to Edom as the probable setting of the book of Job, where 'Eliphaz the Temanite' is prominent.*"<sup>12</sup>

The name Amalek may have jumped out. He is the father of the Amalekites, who became vicious enemies of God's people. They were the first to attack after the exodus from Egypt. Deuteronomy 25 records how they assaulted the Israelites from behind, targeting the weak and worn out.

The Amalekites would produce one of the Jews' arch-villains: Haman, who nearly succeeded in his genocide of the Jewish people, but for God's astounding providence working through Esther.

So why don't we know Amalek as an Edomite? Being the son of a concubine may have disqualified him from inheritance.<sup>13</sup> And we'll see there may have been other political issues at play.

**Genesis 36:15-19 - <sup>15</sup>These are the chiefs among Esau's sons: the sons of Eliphaz, Esau's firstborn: chief Teman, chief Omar, chief Zepho, chief Kenaz, <sup>16</sup>chief Korah, chief Gatam, and chief Amalek. These are the chiefs descended from Eliphaz in the land of Edom. These are the sons of Adah. <sup>17</sup>These are the sons of Reuel, Esau's son: chief Nahath, chief Zerah, chief Shammah, and chief Mizzah. These are the chiefs descended from Reuel in the land of Edom. These are the sons of Esau's wife Basemath. <sup>18</sup>These are the sons of Esau's wife Oholibamah: chief Jeush, chief Jalam, and chief Korah. These are the chiefs descended from Esau's wife Oholibamah daughter of Anah. <sup>19</sup>These are the sons of Esau (that is, Edom), and these are their chiefs.**

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<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Derek Kidner *Genesis*

<sup>13</sup> Andrew Steinmann *Genesis*

Like Israel, Esau's line produced not just families but tribes of people. By human reckoning, he has it all. He's got title, respect, a lot of money, a lovely house in the hills, even some trophy wives. Sure, he had to make some compromises, and he had to cut a few throats on his way to the top, but they were now the Rockefellers of the Seir mountains. In a short amount of time he has spread in numbers and power. While Jacob was still just a *family*, Esau was becoming an *empire*.

**Genesis 36:20-30** - <sup>20</sup>These are the sons of Seir the Horite, the inhabitants of the land: Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah, <sup>21</sup>Dishon, Ezer, and Dishan. These are the chiefs among the Horites, the sons of Seir, in the land of Edom. <sup>22</sup>The sons of Lotan were Hori and Heman. Timna was Lotan's sister. <sup>23</sup>These are Shobal's sons: Alvan, Manahath, Ebal, Shepho, and Onam. <sup>24</sup>These are Zibeon's sons: Aiah and Anah. This was the Anah who found the hot springs in the wilderness while he was pasturing the donkeys of his father Zibeon. <sup>25</sup>These are the children of Anah: Dishon and Oholibamah daughter of Anah. <sup>26</sup>These are Dishon's sons: Hemdan, Eshban, Ithran, and Cheran. <sup>27</sup>These are Ezer's sons: Bilhan, Zaavan, and Akan. <sup>28</sup>These are Dishan's sons: Uz and Aran. <sup>29</sup>These are the chiefs among the Horites: chief Lotan, chief Shobal, chief Zibeon, chief Anah, <sup>30</sup>chief Dishon, chief Ezer, and chief Dishan. These are the chiefs among the Horites, clan by clan, in the land of Seir.

These verses give us a record of the people who were *already* living in Seir when Esau and his clan arrived. When the family of Edom got there, they started by mingling and intermarrying with these native folks from Seir. Esau married into a leading family when he made Oholibamah his wife.<sup>14</sup> And Esau's son brought one of the chiefs' sisters into the family (she was the one who bore Amalek).

But after a time of mingling came the time of massacring. In Deuteronomy 2 we read:

**Deuteronomy 2:12a** - <sup>12</sup>The Horites had previously lived in Seir, but the descendants of Esau drove them out, destroying them completely and settling in their place...

Maybe Amalek didn't appreciate what the Edomites did to his mother's people and separated himself in order to build up a separate clan.

That chapter goes on to tell us that there were Rephaim in the land - giants - and that the Lord helped Esau's descendants drive them out. So we see that the Lord was still interested in this family, even though they had no interest in Him. In fact, we learn in 2 Chronicles 25 that they had become polytheists.

**Genesis 36:31-39** - <sup>31</sup>These are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom before any king reigned over the Israelites: <sup>32</sup>Bela son of Beor reigned in Edom; the name of his city was Dinhabah. <sup>33</sup>When Bela died, Jobab son of Zerah from Bozrah reigned in his place. <sup>34</sup>When Jobab died, Husham from the land of the Temanites reigned in his place. <sup>35</sup>When Husham died, Hadad son of Bedad reigned in his place. He defeated Midian in the field of Moab; the

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<sup>14</sup> Kidner

**name of his city was Avith. <sup>36</sup> When Hadad died, Samlah from Masrekah reigned in his place. <sup>37</sup> When Samlah died, Shaul from Rehoboth on the Euphrates River reigned in his place. <sup>38</sup> When Shaul died, Baal-hanan son of Achbor reigned in his place. <sup>39</sup> When Baal-hanan son of Achbor died, Hadar reigned in his place. His city was Pau, and his wife's name was Mehetabel daughter of Matred daughter of Me-zahab.**

Verse 31 highlights the fact that the Edomites established kings long before Israel. Of course, the Old Testament presents this move as an unspiritual one. It is another attempt by man to throw off the Lord's authority over our lives. These kings were not dynasties - it seems they may have even been elected.<sup>15</sup> But when a democracy is stocked with unspiritual people, unspiritual results will follow.

These sons of Esau have officially become like all the other unbelieving pagans - like the violent masses in Noah's day, the self-sufficient planners at the Tower of Babel, like the immoral city dwellers in the plains of Sodom. The Edomites take their place in history as another God-rejecting group who refused to acknowledge His grace and love.

And, for a while, it seemed like they had it made. They had quite a heritage full of powerful and important people. They had great settlements and many possessions. But the move away from God would have profound implications.

A few verses ago, Esau *embraced* his brother, and hoped they would live together. Then we watch as he chooses flocks over family. Then we see them devouring the inhabitants of Seir. Once we get to the exodus, we find the Edomites were unwilling to allow their cousins to travel through their land. Moses promised to stay on the main road and to pay them for any water they drank, but in response, Edom marched out with a heavily armed force, refusing to let them pass.<sup>16</sup>

Fast forward to the time of the minor prophets. The book of Obadiah is written to the Edomites, condemning them for the violence they did against Israel - how they mocked and gloated when Israel was destroyed and how they stood at the crossroads to capture Jewish fugitives and return them to their killers. In Amos we're told that the Edomites pursued their brothers with the sword, stifled their compassion, and incessantly harbored rage.

Fast forward again to the last Edomites of note: the Herods.<sup>17</sup> They slaughtered the babies of Bethlehem, beheaded John the Baptist and the Apostle James, and abused Jesus with mockery and contempt.

Meanwhile, the Lord's heart was full of love for these people. Listen to what He commanded in Deuteronomy 23:

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<sup>15</sup> See Waltke, Kidner

<sup>16</sup> Numbers 20:17-21

<sup>17</sup> Josephus. *The Antiquities of the Jews*. book 14, chap 15, section 2

**Deuteronomy 23:7-8 - <sup>7</sup>Do not despise an Edomite, because he is your brother...<sup>8</sup>The children born to them in the third generation may enter the Lord's assembly.**

As always, God made a way that they could've been brought into *His* family had they been willing. At this point someone might say, "Wait just a minute! 'Jacob I loved but Esau I hated!'" You find that phrase in Malachi 1 and Romans 9.

Those texts deal with God's plans for the *nations* of Israel and Edom. They speak of the consequences of rejecting God. One source writes, "*In this context loved refers to choice rather than affection, and hated refers to rejection rather than animosity (which was explicitly prohibited against...Esau's descendants, in Deut. 23:7).*"<sup>18</sup> Another says, "*The Hebrew words for loved and hated refer not to God's emotions but to His choice of one over the other for a covenant relationship. Nor do these words by themselves indicate the eternal destinations of Jacob and Esau. The verbs refer to God's acts in history toward both of the two nations which descended from the two brothers.*"<sup>19</sup> God destroyed the Edomite nation for its "rebellion, pride, treachery, greed, and violence,"<sup>20</sup> not because He wouldn't love them.

God loved Esau the man and He loved Esau's children. Esau led his family into material success but spiritual poverty. At first it seemed like he made the right choice, but in the end he proved what God reveals in the book of Proverbs:

**Proverbs 16:25 - <sup>25</sup>There is a way that seems right to a person, but its end is the way to death.**

We have the same sort of life choices to make. Which mountain do we want to climb? The right answer is the mountain of God, the Hill of the Lord, where we receive salvation and blessing and righteousness from a God Who loves us - the God of Jacob.

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<sup>18</sup> *ESV Study Bible Notes*

<sup>19</sup> *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*

<sup>20</sup> *CSB Study Bible Notes*