

Genesis 36 – Esau’s Family

Review

Last time, we looked at the culmination of Jacob’s return journey to Canaan after a twenty-year sojourn in Paddan Aram. Following the despicable vengeance wreaked by Jacob’s sons upon the city of Shechem after the rape of their sister Dinah, God called Jacob to return to Bethel where God had appeared to him in a dream twenty years before. There, God reiterated His renaming of Jacob as Israel and His promise to give the land of Canaan to Jacob and his descendants.

Sometime later, Jacob continued on his way to his father Isaac’s dwelling place at Kiriath-arba (Hebron). Jacob’s wife Rachel died giving birth to Jacob’s youngest son Benjamin somewhere along the way from Bethel to Ephrath (Bethlehem). With Benjamin’s birth, the list of the twelve patriarchs who were to become the progenitors of the nation of Israel was complete.

After burying Rachel on the way from Bethel to Bethlehem, Jacob returned at last to his father Isaac’s home in Kiriath-arba after his twenty-year sojourn in Paddan-aram. Some short time later, Isaac died at the age of 180 years, and his sons Esau and Jacob buried him in the Cave of Machpelah which Abraham had bought as a family burial place many years before.

In that lesson, we also looked at the symbolism of earrings in God’s Word. We also noted that God’s Word is silent regarding the death of Jacob’s mother Rebekah, although the extra-biblical Book of Jubilees does mention the reunion of mother and son after Jacob returned from Paddan Aram.

Concerning Genealogies

So far, Genesis has focused on giving us the lineage of the Messiah first promised in Genesis 3:15 from Eve to Abraham’s grandson Jacob – the patriarch of God’s chosen people Israel through whom God would eventually bring forth our Savior Jesus. Starting in Genesis 25 and continuing through Genesis 35, the story focused on Jacob himself. Starting in Genesis 37, the focus shifts to Jacob’s second-youngest son Joseph and will remain on him for the remainder of the book. Before we launch into the final section of the book of Genesis which centers around Jacob’s son Joseph, we first take a detailed look at the genealogy of Jacob’s brother Esau in Genesis 36.

Genealogies were highly regarded in ancient Jewish culture and literature, as indeed they continue to be today. Tragically, family identities and histories among the Israelites have been largely wiped away over the millennia – first during the Babylonian captivity, then over the millennia of the global Jewish diaspora following the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 AD, and culminating in the systematic destruction by the Nazis during World War II of synagogues throughout Europe containing their priceless records of births, deaths, and marriages among the Jewish people. This loss of corporate knowledge is so complete that most Jews living today cannot even identify the tribe of Israel from which their families came.

Genealogies feature prominently throughout God’s Word as we have already seen during our study of Genesis, but no genealogy is ever complete. It would be impossible to create a genealogy containing all the names of the billions of people who have ever lived, and even if we could create an exhaustive genealogy, it would become obsolete almost immediately, since four new babies are born on Earth every second of every day. So, any genealogy must have a specific purpose and a limited scope.

When we study Biblical genealogies, we must continually keep in mind the purpose for which God has given us His Word – to reveal for all mankind the Gospel of Jesus Christ through which God determined since before the beginning to redeem mankind out of death in our sins by Jesus’ sacrifice of His own life on the cross in our place. Consequently, as we make our way through the Bible, we find that the genealogies there become more focused. For example, in Genesis 4 we find a short genealogy of Cain’s descendants, but that’s the last we read about Cain’s family. Instead, the focus turns to the descendants of Adam and Eve’s youngest son Seth. Similarly, following the great flood, we find

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listings of the descendants of all three of Noah’s sons and the lands in which their descendants lived in the so-called “table of nations” (Genesis 10), but the Genesis narrative then quickly focuses in on Abram from whose line Jesus the מָשִׁיחַ *māšīaḥ* was to be born.

So, it is with the genealogy of Esau that we find in Genesis 36. Although God’s Word lists the first few generations of Esau’s descendants, we find little mention of Esau and his descendants after that except on those occasions when Esau’s story impacts the main focus of God’s Word – the history of His chosen people Israel who were descended from Esau’s twin brother Jacob.

Furthermore, we must always remember that Biblical names – like names in general – are often reused, and sometimes the Bible gives variant spellings for a given name. Finally, although we firmly hold that all scripture is God-breathed and therefore completely without error in its original form, the transcribed copies of the Bible which have survived to come down to us contain occasional transcription errors. We must always keep that fact in mind. Therefore, we need to be careful in drawing any hard and fast conclusions from Biblical genealogies.

God’s Plan for Esau

I can’t help but feel a little sorry for Esau and for his family. After all, he was Isaac’s firstborn and was indeed Isaac’s favorite of his two twin sons. Yet Jacob tricked Esau out of his rightful inheritance as firstborn, and try as he might to please his parents, Esau was always in his brother’s shadow, until finally we read in the prophecy of Malachi...

***2*“I have loved you [Israel],” says the LORD. But you say, “How have you loved us?” “Is not Esau Jacob’s brother?” declares the LORD. “Yet I have loved Jacob ³but Esau I have hated. I have laid waste his hill country and left his heritage to jackals of the desert.” Malachi 1:2-3 (ESV)**

This seems an outrageous thing for God to say. Our human sense of justice and compassion (with which, after all, God Himself imbued us) rebels against this word from Malachi. Nevertheless, it reminds us that God’s will is sovereign, and His knowledge of right and justice is infinite, while ours is limited to our own tiny sphere of observation. So, we trust that God has His own good reasons for saying this about Esau. Furthermore, God’s purposes always righteous and true from everlasting to everlasting even (and especially) if we in our ignorance and pridefulness might disagree. Furthermore, God provided for Esau’s descendants and spoke to Moses to warn the Israelites against contending with them on their return to Canaan after their captivity in Egypt and their forty-year wandering in the wilderness of Sinai...

***3*“You have been traveling around this mountain country long enough. Turn northward ⁴and command the people, “You are about to pass through the territory of your brothers, the people of Esau, who live in Seir; and they will be afraid of you. So be very careful. ⁵Do not contend with them, for I will not give you any of their land, no, not so much as for the sole of the foot to tread on, because I have given Mount Seir to Esau as a possession.” Deuteronomy 2:3-5 (ESV)**

So, with that understanding and trust in God’s purposes, let’s look in detail at Esau’s family.

NOTE – Genesis 36 consists of several sections, each devoted to a specific facet of Esau’s family and the descendants of Seir whose family Esau married into and whose lands Esau inherited. These sub-genealogies are also found almost verbatim in 1 Chronicles 1:35-54. Since the two passages are virtually identical, we will not delve further into 1 Chronicles 1 in this lesson.

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Generations of Esau & Chiefs of Edom

Genesis 36:1-14 provides a listing of some of Esau’s descendants born to three of Esau’s wives – Adah, Aholibamah, and Basemath. Of these descendants, some are listed as “Chiefs of Edom” in Genesis 36:15-19. Recall from Genesis 25:30 that Esau (עֵשָׂו `Esav – hairy) was also called Edom (אֶדוֹם ‘Edom – red) after he sold his birthright as the firstborn of Isaac to his younger twin brother Jacob for some stew of red lentils. The name Edom is also used for the land of Seir east of the Dead Sea where Esau settled following his reunion with Jacob in Genesis 33.

1These are the generations of Esau [עֵשָׂו `ēsāv – hairy] (***that is, Edom*** [אֶדוֹם `ēdōm – red]).

2Esau took his wives from the Canaanites: Adah [אָדָה `ādā – ornament] ***the daughter of Elon*** [אֵילֹן `ēlōn – terebinth, mighty] ***the Hittite, Oholibamah*** [אֹהֳלִיבָמָה `āhōlībāmā – tent of the high place] ***the daughter of Anah*** [אָנָה `ānā – answer] ***the daughter of Zibeon*** [צִבְעוֹן `sīb `ōn – coloured] ***the Hivite,*** ***3and Basemath*** [בַּסְמַת `bāsmat – spice], ***Ishmael’s*** [יִשְׁמָעֵאל `yīsmā `ē’l – God will hear] ***daughter, the sister of Nebaioth*** [נֶבְיֹאֹת `nəb’yōt – heights]. ***4And Adah bore to Esau, Eliphaz*** [אֵלִיפָאז `ēlīpāz – my God is fine gold]; ***Basemath bore Reuel*** [רְעוּאֵל `rē’u’el – friend of God]; ***5and Oholibamah bore Jeush*** [יְעוּשׁ `yē’ūš – he hurries to aid], ***Jalam*** [יָלָם `ya `lām – concealed], ***and Korah*** [קֹרַח `qōrah – bald]. ***These are the sons of Esau who were born to him in the land of Canaan.***

6Then Esau took his wives, his sons, his daughters, and all the members of his household, his livestock, all his beasts, and all his property that he had acquired in the land of Canaan. He went into a land away from his brother Jacob. 7For their possessions were too great for them to dwell together. The land of their sojournings could not support them because of their livestock. 8So Esau settled in the hill country of Seir [שְׂעִיר `šē`ir – hairy or shaggy]. ***(Esau is Edom.)***

9These are the generations of Esau the father of the Edomites in the hill country of Seir. 10These are the names of Esau’s sons: Eliphaz the son of Adah the wife of Esau, Reuel the son of Basemath the wife of Esau. 11The sons of Eliphaz were Teman [תֵּמָן `tēmān – south], ***Omar*** [אֹמָר `ōmār – speaker or eloquent], ***Zepho*** [צִפְּוֹ `ṣəp̄ō – watch-tower], ***Gatam*** [גַּתָּם `gā `tām – a burnt valley], ***and Kenaz*** [קִנָּז `qināz – hunter]. ***12(Timna*** [תִּמְנָה `timnā – restrained] ***was a concubine of Eliphaz, Esau’s son; she bore Amalek*** [אַמָּלֵק `āmālēq – dweller in a valley] ***to Eliphaz.) These are the sons of Adah, Esau’s wife. 13These are the sons of Reuel: Nahath*** [נַחַת `nahat – rest], ***Zerah*** [זֵרַח `zerah – rising], ***Shammah*** [שַׁמָּה `šammā – astonishment], ***and Mizzah*** [מִצֵּזַח `mizzē – fear]. ***These are the sons of Basemath, Esau’s wife. 14These are the sons of Oholibamah the daughter of Anah the daughter of Zibeon, Esau’s wife: she bore to Esau Jeush, Jalam, and Korah.***

15These are the chiefs of the sons of Esau. The sons of Eliphaz the firstborn of Esau: the chiefs Teman, Omar, Zepho, Kenaz, 16Korah, Gatam, and Amalek; these are the chiefs of Eliphaz in the land of Edom; these are the sons of Adah. 17These are the sons of Reuel, Esau’s son: the chiefs Nahath, Zerah, Shammah, and Mizzah; these are the chiefs of Reuel in the land of Edom; these are the sons of Basemath, Esau’s wife. 18These are the sons of Oholibamah, Esau’s wife: the chiefs Jeush, Jalam, and Korah; these are the chiefs born of Oholibamah the daughter of Anah, Esau’s wife. 19These are the sons of Esau (that is, Edom), and these are their chiefs. Genesis 36:1-19

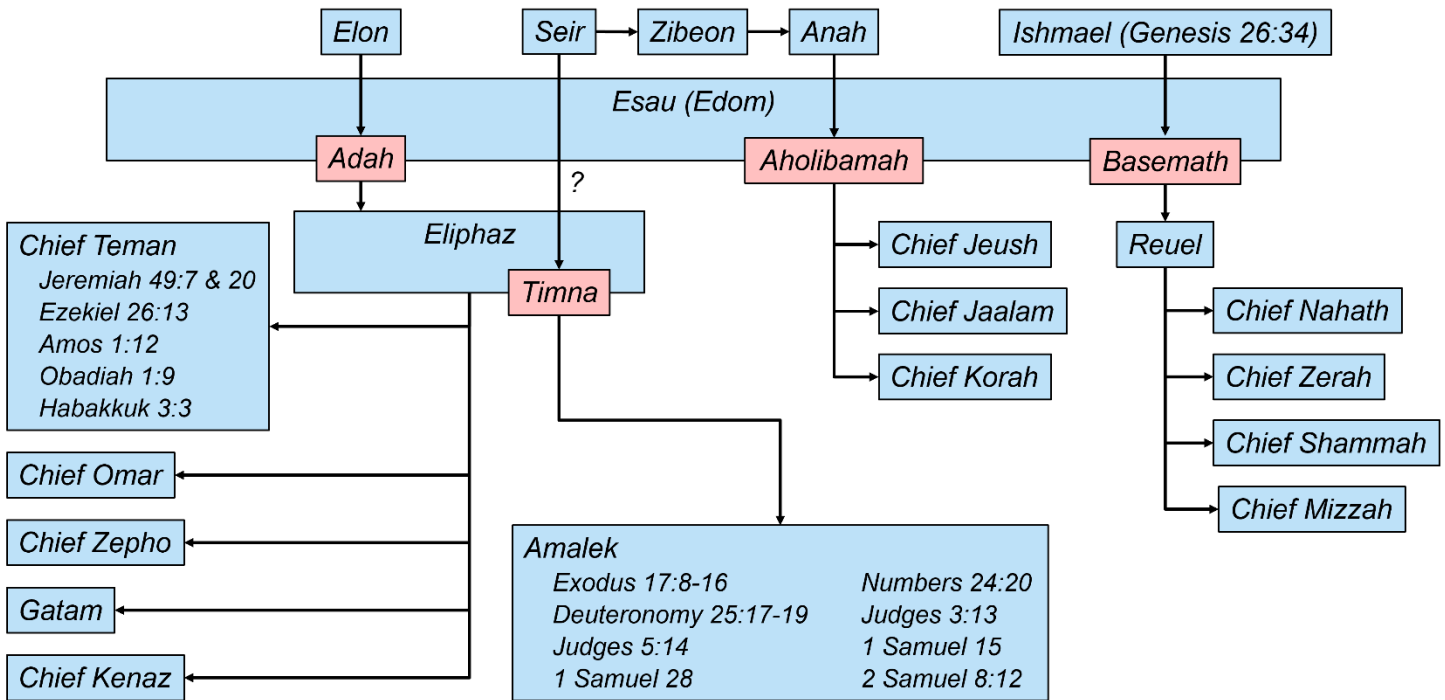
(ESV)

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Before we examine Esau’s family more closely, notice that there is considerable repetition in this passage. In verses 1-5 we find Esau’s wives and sons listed. Then in verses 9-14 we find lists of Esau’s grandsons. Finally, in verses 15-19, the grandsons are listed again as the chiefs of their clans.

Look at the Family of Esau & Chiefs of Edom Diagram

Genesis 36:1-19 – The Family of Esau & Chiefs of Edom



CAVEAT – The family tree diagrams in this lesson should be taken as “best guesses” only. They were created using only the Biblical text along with various Bible dictionaries, atlases, and encyclopedias. As is my usual habit, I purposely did not refer to any Bible commentaries in drawing my conclusions. In some cases, I had to make a “judgment call” to determine how to interpret the Biblical text. Obviously, such decisions are not the only way to interpret the text, so I ask my readers (if any) to please do your own research and reach your own conclusions.

Genesis 36:1-14 provides a listing of some of Esau’s descendants born to three of Esau’s wives – Adah, Aholibamah, and Basemath (female names shown in pink). Of these descendants, some are listed as “Chiefs of Edom” in Genesis 36:15-19. Recall from Genesis 25:30 that Esau [עֵשָׂו *Esav* – hairy] was also called Edom [אֱדוֹם *Edom* – red] after he sold his birthright as the firstborn of Isaac for some stew of red lentils to his younger twin brother Jacob. Hence, Esau acquired the nickname “Red.” This name אֱדוֹם *Edom* is also used for the land of Seir east of the Dead Sea where Esau settled following his reunion with Jacob in Genesis 33.

Esau’s wife Basemath was his cousin – the daughter of his uncle Ishmael. Basemath bore Esau’s son Reuel, who in turn had four sons who became chiefs of Edom.

Esau’s wife Aholibamah bore him three sons who are also called Chiefs of Edom. Aholibamah was the great-granddaughter of Seir the Hivite – progenitor of the people who occupied the land where Esau eventually settled. The first mention of Aholibamah is a little confusing.

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²Esau took his wives from the Canaanites: Adah the daughter of Elon the Hittite, Oholibamah the daughter of Anah the daughter of Zibeon the Hivite, Genesis 36:2 (ESV)

In Genesis 36:20 and 24 Zibeon and Anah are listed as the son and grandson of Seir respectively. Yet here in Genesis 36:2 the ESV translation might lead us to think Anah was the *daughter* of Zibeon!

1. Possibly, Zibeon had a son and daughter both named Anah. This seems very unlikely. One would think that a father who gave his son and daughter identical names must have been hit on the head repeatedly. George Foreman springs to mind... but I digress.
2. There may have been a transcription error in Genesis 36:2 somewhere along the way from the original text to the surviving copies available today. In fact, some of the available texts list Anah as the son – not the daughter – of Zibeon in Genesis 36:2. The Hebrew words for son and daughter are very similar [בַּת **bath** – daughter and בֵּן **ben** – son], so this would be a very easy error for a scribe to make.
3. But most likely the second instance of בַּת **bath** in Genesis 36:2 is referring to Aholibamah, not Anah, so it might better be translated as “granddaughter” rather than “daughter.” Several English translations do render the verse in this way – e.g. NLT, NIV, CSB, and NASB.

Esau’s wife Adah was the daughter of Elon the Hittite. The Hittite empire was centered in modern Turkey and extended southward into what is now Lebanon and northern Israel. Adah bore Esau one son – Eliphaz. Several sons of Eliphaz are listed in Genesis 36, four of whom are also named as “Chiefs of Edom.” Of these, two are mentioned elsewhere in God’s Word outside the genealogies found in Genesis 36 and 1 Chronicles 1. Chief Teman is mentioned in the prophecies of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos, Obadiah, and Habakuk. In these prophecies, Teman is taken as the “poster child” for all the declarations against the land and people of Edom. Perhaps this is because Eliphaz was the firstborn of Esau, and Teman was the firstborn of Eliphaz.

Eliphaz had a concubine named Timna. In Genesis 36:12, Timna is listed as the sister of Seir’s son Lotan. Thus, Timna was the name of one of Seir’s daughters. Therefore, our family tree of Esau’s descendants shows Eliphaz’s concubine Timna as Seir’s daughter. So, Esau’s son Eliphaz is shown in the diagram as having Seir’s daughter as a concubine while Eliphaz’s father Esau is shown married to Seir’s great-granddaughter Aholibamah! We are thus left to wonder whether Timna was extremely old when she bore Eliphaz’s son Amalek, or possibly Eliphaz’s concubine Timna isn’t the same person as Seir’s daughter Timna. Thus, the connection in our diagram between Seir and Timna is marked with a question mark.

Regardless of all that, by far the most significant of all Esau’s descendants in the history of Israel is Timna’s son Amalek.

- **Exodus 17:8-16** – As the Israelites were making their way from Egypt after crossing over the Red Sea when God divided the sea for their passage (Exodus 15), the descendants of Amalek attacked the Israelites at a place called Rephidim. Whenever Moses held up his staff, the Israelites prevailed, but whenever Moses lowered his arms, the Amalekites prevailed. So, Moses’ brother Aaron and Hur held up Moses’ arms until the Israelite army under the command of Joshua won the battle.
- **Numbers 24:20** – Balaam son of Beor prophesied the destruction of the Amalekites.

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- **Deuteronomy 25:17-19** – God directed the utter destruction of the Amalekites by the Israelites as recompense for the Amalekites’ attack on Israel at Rephidim.
- **Judges 3:13** – The Amalekites allied with the Amonites and Moabites to defeat Israel in battle at the City of Palms, and the King of Moab then ruled over the Israelites for eighteen years before God raised up Ehud the judge to defeat him.
- **Judges 5:14** – Amalek is mentioned in the song of Deborah the prophetess following the defeat of the army of King Jabin of Canaan by Barak the judge at Mt. Tabor.
- **1 Samuel 15** – Through Samuel, God commanded King Saul to utterly destroy the Amalekites including all the men, women, children, livestock, and material goods of the Amalekites, but Saul disobeyed, taking the King of the Amalekites captive, and seizing spoils and slaves from the Amalekites. Because of this disobedience, God removed the kingdom from Saul.
- **1 Samuel 28** – Saul consulted a spiritualist. She called up Samuel’s spirit who confirmed that God would remove the kingdom from Saul through defeat in battle with the Philistines due to his failure to wipe out the Amalekites.
- **2 Samuel 8:12** – King David dedicated spoils taken from the Amalekites to the LORD.

Before we move on, notice that Genesis 36:3 specifically points out that Esau’s wife Basemath was Ishmael’s daughter - the sister of Ishmael’s son Nebaioth. Recall from Genesis 28:9 that Nebaioth had another sister whom Esau also married.

⁹Esau went to Ishmael and took as his wife, besides the wives he had, Mahalath** [מַחֲלַת mahālat -stringed instrument] **the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham’s son, the sister of Nebaioth. Genesis 28:9 (ESV)

Yet we find no mention of Mahalath here in Genesis 36. Furthermore, notice that Genesis 28:9 speaks of wives that Esau already had when he married Mahalath. Their names are recorded in Genesis 26:34.

³⁴When Esau was forty years old, he took Judith** [יְהוּדִית y’hūdīt - Jewess or praised] **the daughter of Beeri** [בְּעֵרִי b’ērī – my well] **the Hittite to be his wife, and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite, Genesis 26:34 (ESV)

Note that Genesis 26:34 lists Basemath as the daughter of Elon while Genesis 36:3 says that Basemath was the daughter of Ishmael and sister of Mahalath and Nebaioth. How can we explain this? Could Esau have married two women both called Basemath? Regardless of that, we find no mention of Basemath the daughter of Elon or Judith the daughter of Beeri anywhere except here in Genesis 26:34. Nor are the names of their children mentioned anywhere in the Bible so far as we know. Perhaps these wives were barren or possibly their descendants had no noteworthy role in the later history of Israel, so God simply left them out of His Word.

Family of Seir

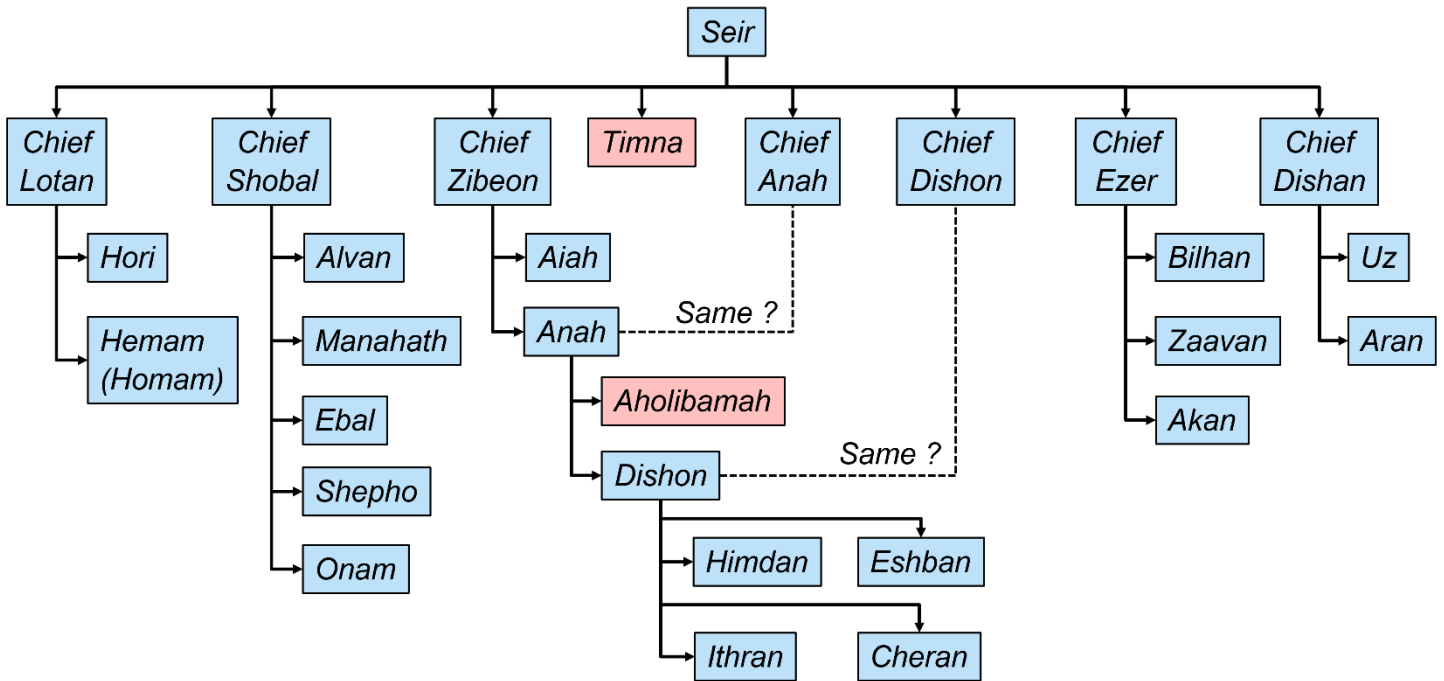
***²⁰These are the sons of Seir the Horite, the inhabitants of the land: Lotan** [לוֹטָן lôṭān – covering], **Shobal** [שׁוֹבָל šôḅāl – flowing], **Zibeon, Anah,** **²¹Dishon** [דִּישׁוֹן dīšōn – thresher], **Ezer** [עֶזֶר ’ēser – treasure], **and Dishan** [דִּישָׁן dīšān – thresher]; **these are the chiefs of the Horites, the sons of Seir in the land of Edom.** **²²The sons of Lotan were Hori** [חֹרִי hōrī – cave dweller] **and Hemam** [חֵמָם hēmām – exterminating]; **and Lotan’s sister was Timna.** **²³These are the sons of Shobal: Alvan** [אֱלָוָן ’alvān – tall], **Manahath** [מְנַחֲתַת]*

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mānahat – rest], **Ebal** [עִבָּל *‘ēḇāl* – stone or bare mountain], **Shepho** [שֵׁפּוֹ *šəpō* – bold], and **Onam** [אֹנָם *‘ōnām* – vigorous]. ²⁴These are the sons of Zibeon: **Aiah** [אֵיָה *‘ayyā* – falcon] and **Anah**; he is the Anah who found the hot springs in the wilderness, as he pastured the donkeys of Zibeon his father. ²⁵These are the children of Anah: **Dishon** and **Aholibamah** the daughter of Anah. ²⁶These are the sons of Dishon: **Hemdan** [חֵמְדָן *hemdān* – desire], **Eshban** [אֶשְׁבָּן *‘ešbān* – fire of discernment], **Ithran** [יִתְרָן *yitrān* – advantage], and **Cheran** [כְּרָן *krān* – lyre]. ²⁷These are the sons of Ezer: **Bilhan** [בִּלְחָן *bilhān* – their decrepitude], **Zaavan** [זַאֲוָן *zā‘āvān* – troubled], and **Akan** [אֶקָן *‘āqān* – sharp-sighted]. ²⁸These are the sons of Dishan: **Uz** [עֹז *‘ūs* – wooded] and **Aran** [אַרָן *‘ārān* – joyous]. ²⁹These are the chiefs of the Horites: the chiefs **Lotan**, **Shobal**, **Zibeon**, **Anah**, ³⁰**Dishon**, **Ezer**, and **Dishan**; these are the chiefs of the Horites, chief by chief in the land of Seir. Genesis 36:20-30 (ESV)

Look at the Family of Seir diagram.

Genesis 36:20-30 – The Family of Seir



The descendants of Seir were the occupants of the area east of the Dead Sea when Esau took over the land. No ancestry of Seir is given in God’s Word. The descendants of Seir were absorbed under the rule of the descendants of Esau (Edom). God gave the land of Seir to Esau’s descendants just as He gave the land of Canaan to Israel (Deuteronomy 2:1-5). The most notable descendants of Seir are Zibeon his son, Anah his grandson, and Aholibamah his great-granddaughter, who became Esau’s wife.

In Genesis 36:20, God uses the Hebrew word בְּנֵי *bēn* in listing the “sons” of Seir. Most English translations render בְּנֵי *ben* as “sons” (with some notable exceptions). Notice also that בְּנֵי *ben* in this verse has the Hebrew letter *yod* appended, making it plural. But this Hebrew word can also refer to grandsons, and more distant descendants. Furthermore, although בְּנֵי *bēn* is a masculine noun, it can also refer to female descendants much as the English word mankind usually refers to all human beings, both male and female. In fact, the NLT somewhat humorously uses the cumbersome phrase “*names of the tribes that descended from*” in translating בְּנֵי *bēn* here in Genesis 36:20. We

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find בְּנֵי *bēn* again in Genesis 36:22, but in that verse, the KJV and ASV translate it as “children” while the NLT calls Lotan’s children “descendants.”

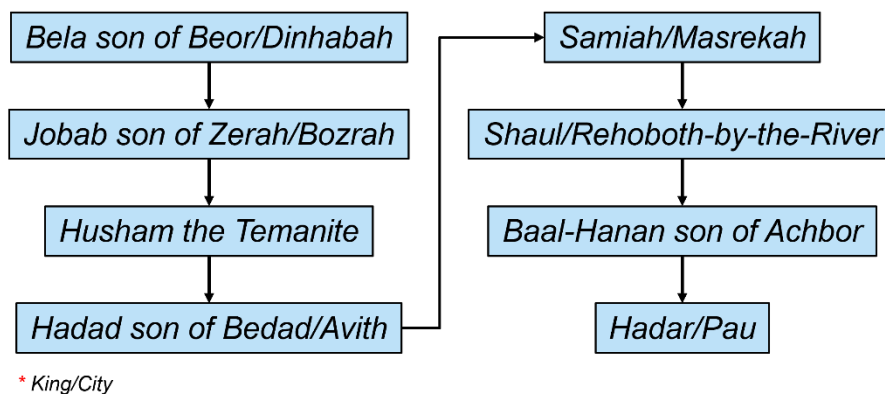
Genesis 36:20 lists Anah as the son of Seir as shown in this diagram. It is possible that Seir had both a son named Anah called a “*chief of the Horites*” in Genesis 36:21 about whom nothing further is mentioned, and a grandson of the same name who was the son of Zibeon and father of Esau’s wife Aholibamah. Similarly, Dishon is listed as both a son of Seir and a grandson of Zibeon. It seems very strange that Seir would name two sons Dishon and Dishan – both names having the same meaning with slightly different spellings and pronunciations. Possibly these two instances of the name Dishon refer to the same person – Seir’s great-grandson and Aholibamah’s brother, who was so named after his father Anah’s uncle Dishan.

Kings of Edom

³¹These are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom, before any king reigned over the Israelites. ³²Bela the son of Beor reigned in Edom, the name of his city being Dinhabah. ³³Bela died, and Jobab the son of Zerah of Bozrah reigned in his place. ³⁴Jobab died, and Husham of the land of the Temanites reigned in his place. ³⁵Husham died, and Hadad the son of Bedad, who defeated Midian in the country of Moab, reigned in his place, the name of his city being Avith. ³⁶Hadad died, and Samlah of Masrekah reigned in his place. ³⁷Samlah died, and Shaul of Rehoboth on the Euphrates [נָהָר nāhār – stream, river] reigned in his place. ³⁸Shaul died, and Baal-hanan the son of Achbor reigned in his place. ³⁹Baal-hanan the son of Achbor died, and Hadar reigned in his place, the name of his city being Pau; his wife’s name was Mehetabel, the daughter of Matred, daughter of Mezahab. Genesis 36:31-39 (ESV)

Look at the Kings of Edom diagram.

Genesis 36:31-39 – Kings of Edom



Little can be determined Biblically of the time these kings reigned in Edom or their genealogical relationships to the descendants of Esau and Seir we have been studying in this passage, apart from the clear statement in Genesis 36:31 that they reigned before there was a king in Judah. Thus, the reigns of these kings of Edom must have been during the time of the judges in Israel or before. This passage gives us only their names, the names of the cities in which they reigned, and their line of succession.

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Some of their names appear elsewhere in God’s Word. These other appearances may refer to these same kings of Edom or to other men having identical names. For example, Jobab is also listed in Genesis 10:29 as the name of a fifth-generation descendant of Noah’s son Shem. Since we don’t know exactly when these Kings of Edom reigned, and in most cases, we don’t know how long Shem’s descendants lived, we have no way to determine whether Jobab the King of Edom was Noah’s great-great-great-grandson or not.

The name Beor should also be familiar. Recall that Balaam the prophet whom the king of Midian called upon to curse Israel as they returned through Midian to Canaan following their Egyptian captivity (Numbers 22, 24, and 31) was also called “*son of Beor*.” Here again, as we noted above, the Hebrew בֶּן *bēn* may mean a son, a grandson, or a more distant descendant. So, we have no way to determine how many generations separated Bela and Balaam in the line of their forefather Beor.

English translations are roughly split in translating the Hebrew נָהָר *nāhār* found in Genesis 36:37. Some render it simply as “*river*,” while others like the ESV translate it as “*the Euphrates*.” This word in isolation usually refers to the Euphrates. When it refers to some other river the name of the river is explicitly given. For example, in Genesis 15:18 we find the Nile called “*the river of Egypt*,” and the Euphrates is simply called “*the great river* (נָהָר *nāhār*)” with the proper Hebrew name of the Euphrates (פְּרַת *p̄rāt*) added just to make things crystal clear.

ASIDE – Recall that the nation of Israel has yet to occupy the entire territory between these rivers promised by God to Abram’s descendants (זֶרַע *zera* – *seed*) in Genesis 15:18. But I digress...

In Genesis 36:38 we find the first mention of the name Baal (בַּעַל *Ba`al* – *lord*.) This was a generic Hebrew word applied to various Canaanite gods. In 1 Kings 18, the prophet Elijah confronted and executed 450 prophets of Baal at Mt. Carmel. In the case of the Edomite king Baal-Hanan however, the name Baal was likely just an honorary title “Lord Hanan” rather than a reference to the Canaanite idols.

Chiefs of Esau

***40**These are the names of the chiefs of Esau, according to their clans and their dwelling places, by their names: the chiefs Timna, Alvah [עֲלֵוָה *’alvā* – evil], Jetheth [אֵתֵיץ *’ēṭēṭ* – a nail], **41**Oholibamah, Elah [אֵלָה *’ēlā* – an oak], Pinon [פִּינּוֹן *pīnōn* – darkness], **42**Kenaz, Teman, Mibzar [מִבְצָר *mibṣār* – fortress], **43**Magdiel [מַגְדִּיאֵל *magdī’ēl* – prince of God], and Iram [אֵירָם *’īrām* – belonging to a city]; these are the chiefs of Edom (that is, Esau, the father of Edom), according to their dwelling places in the land of their possession. Genesis 36:40-43 (ESV)*

Notice that this passage refers to “*chiefs of Esau*” rather than chiefs of Edom. This implies that these chiefs were descended from Esau himself rather than chiefs within the territory of Sier which God gave to Esau who had no blood tie to Esau’s own family. Also notice that while the passage refers twice to these chiefs’ “*dwelling places*,” no dwelling places are listed. We can therefore presume that their dwelling places were named after them, and that Moses’ readers would have known where those places were located.

The names of the chiefs of Esau given in Genesis 36:40-43 are simply listed without reference to any period when they ruled, family relationships, or geographical location. Some of these names are familiar from earlier in this chapter and elsewhere. These may be the same people, or perhaps others

Genesis 36 – Esau’s Family

with identical names. Some of the names of these chiefs are only found here and in the parallel genealogy found in 1 Chronicles 1:51-54 with no further information available about them.

Throughout God’s Word, with rare exception the named leaders are men. So, it is quite intriguing that we find two women’s names in this list of the Chiefs of Esau – Aholibamah Esau’s wife and Timna his son Epliphaz’ concubine (assuming these two names refer to the same two people).

Looking Ahead

Next time, we’ll begin our study of the last major section of the book of Genesis – the story of Jacob’s second youngest son Joseph who was sold into slavery in Egypt by his jealous brothers, but rose to a position among Egyptian royalty second only to Pharaoh himself, and whom God used to rescue Jacob’s family out of starvation when widespread famine struck the region, thus preserving the line of Israel that would lead ultimately to Jesus of Nazareth.