

## Names That Tell a Story Genesis 36:1-43

A person can get lost in the wonder of names. For example, after a little Google search, Wideman is of Germanic origin and means “hunter”. I found a map of the US showing that in 1840 Wideman’s lived in 9 states and by 1920 there were Wideman’s in 40 of the 48 states. In 1920 Wideman men held such jobs as laborers, farmers, truck drivers and salesmen while women worked as teachers, houseworkers, cooks, and maids. In 1943, medical records indicate that the life expectancy was 43 which was below the national average, but in 2004 it was slightly higher at 77.

Someone has calculated that if you meet 100,000 people one of them will be a Wideman. That seems like a pretty rare event, so for those who know me, you are a privileged group. About 40 years ago, a relative in Canada compiled a detailed book on the Wideman heritage. It’s about 200 pages long. It gives the year they were born and the year they died. It gives the year and who they married. The names of any children and the year they were born, who they married and when they died, who they married and the names of their children and who they married and when they died. It’s a list of the Wideman genealogy for our family.

The introduction has some interesting tidbits that provide some points of conversation. For example, the mother of Robert Browning, was a Wiedemann (English rendering of the name). He is the same guy who married Elizabeth Barrett.

Our ancestry includes a strong Mennonite background and it was Henry Wideman who moved from Pennsylvania to Markham, Ontario to establish one of if not the first Mennonite churches in Canada in 1816. It’s still in existence today.

Admittedly though, a book with names and dates can be rather boring. It’s really of little interest to anyone outside the family. We might read them only as an aid for falling asleep, much like counting sheep. Unfortunately, a person who only takes a cursory glance through the pages of a genealogy can

miss nuggets of information that are valuable to the reader if only he had taken the time to sift through all the names.

That’s the case for our passage today. For years I have made it a practice to read through the Bible. I have to admit that in my haste to get to the meat of what is to come in the life and annals of Joseph, I have skimmed over this chapter like I would the want ads. There seems to be little substance to the 43 verses that tell us the names of chiefs and kings who are part of the lineage of Esau. As I studied this passage my blind eyes began to see the promise of **II Timothy 3:16** that “**all Scripture is given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit**” Even a list of names has a purpose in God’s grand scheme for what is included in the Bible. Read in all carefully.

So as we come to **Genesis 36**, although it seems out of place, even parenthetical to what is going on in the life of Jacob and his family, it is important. It seems out of place because it has nothing to do with Jacob who is the heir to the covenant promise of God. It is all about his twin brother Esau and his family tree. Yet from it we have some things that we can glean and learn from. In the end, I hope that after a look at Esau from this chapter, we will be challenged by what we learn from his lineage. His life can teach, instruct, rebuke and correct us in our desire to walk in godliness.

I would first like to look at the promise to Esau.

### I. THE PROMISE TO ESAU

From this list of names we see first promise the promise of his people.

#### A. The promise of His People – vs. 1-5

We begin by noting in **verse 1** that this is the account of Esau. It’s a record or report of his descendants. After the death of Isaac, Jacob became the official keeper of family records. No doubt Esau gave him a list of descendants for the family tree. We are again introduced to his three wives and five sons. The names of his wives are Adah, Aholibamah and Basemath. All three women were Canaanite. We read back in **26:34** that the first two

he married were Judith and Basemath. In **28:9** he took a third wife by the name of Mahalath. When you compare those passages with our text you can see there are some differences, what some people consider a discrepancy. Some conclude that he had married additional wives. Let me see if I can clarify it for you. We read in **26:35** that his first two wives **“were a source of grief to Isaac and Rebekah.”** As daughters-in-law go, they weren’t the favorites of Isaac and Rebekah. Their names were Judith and Basemath. This is not the same Basemath in our text. To add insult to injury, we read in **28:8-9** **“Esau then realized how displeasing the Canaanite women were to his father Isaac; So he went to Ishmael and married Mahamath...in addition to the wives he already had.”**

His third wife was the daughter of his Uncle Ishmael. All three were from the pagan culture around them. When it came to his choice of wives, he wasn’t at all concerned that they didn’t share the godly values of his family. He deliberately went out and married women he knew would displease his parents showing further disregard for his family heritage of following Jehovah God. They didn’t share the same values or follow the same God Esau’s parents did. He did it to irritate them, like soap in the eyes. **I wonder how many times I did something that displeased my parents?**

Let me take a moment and tell you about his three wives. I believe the wives mentioned in **chapters 26 and 28** are the same as the wives in our passage. It has been suggested that the names were changed to remove some of the strong pagan influence. Remember that four Hebrew young men, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah had their names changed to Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego in keeping with Babylonian gods. These women had name changes to appease Isaac and then dropped them once they had moved away.

The Adah of our text is the same as Basemath in **chapter 26**. Adah had a son by the name of Eliphaz. Eliphaz had a son by the name of Teman. One of Job’s friends who came to give him comfort was

Eliphaz the Temanite. They are not the same person, but likely a descendant of this Grandson of Esau.

We also read in **verse 12** something interesting about Eliphaz. The text doesn’t give us the name of his wife, but it does give us the name of his concubine, Timna and a child she bore. His name was Amalek. He would become the head of the Amalekites who would be a perpetual thorn in the side of Israel for centuries.

In **Exodus 17:8-16** the Amalekites attacked Israel. Aaron and Hur held up the arms of Moses so that they could defeat the enemy. God swore that He would have war with the Amalekites from generation to generation.

In **Numbers 14:39-45** Moses had just informed the Israelites that they would not get into the Promised Land because of their constant rebellion against God. They immediately wanted to repent so God would take them to their inheritance. Moses told them that God wasn’t with them and that if they chose to go out on their own, they could expect the Amalekites and Canaanites to defeat them.

In **Numbers 24:20** Balaam called the Amalekites the first among the nations, which spoke of their great power.

In **Deuteronomy 25:17-19** God instructed Israel to wipe out the Amalekites for all they had done in opposing Israel.

In **I Samuel 15** King Saul was to attack the Amalekites and utterly destroy them but Saul spared the king. As a result of his disobedience God set in motion the removal of Saul as king.

Throughout the history of Israel in the Old Testament, the Amalekites were their enemies.

Then there is Esau’s wife Aholibamah. She is Judith from the earlier passage. Her name means ‘tent of the High Place’ and scholars believe that it refers to a temple priestess or temple prostitute. She was from the land of Seir where they would all eventually live after Jacob returned to Canaan. She was of noble stock and so perhaps had influenced

Esau that he could make a name for himself if they moved back to her people. It is through her that the Idumeans spring, with perhaps the most infamous Idumean descendant being Herod the Great who murdered all the baby boys in Bethlehem at the time of Jesus's birth.

His third wife was Mahalath or Basemath. She is more obscure but we read in the chapter that her descendants also became chiefs.

Several times throughout the chapter we read that Esau was also Edom. In **Numbers 20:14-21** we see that the Edomites, the descendants of Esau, refused to give aid to Israel as they were traveling to the Promised Land after leaving Egypt.

We learn a couple of things from Esau from our text. First, God always keeps His word, even when it is someone who does not follow Him. Before Esau and Jacob were even born and they were battling in their mother's womb, God told Rebekah that the two sons she was carrying would become separate nations. This chapter shows us that God is faithful to do what He promises.

The second thing we learn about Esau in this passage and from what we have discovered by our study of him in past chapters is that our decisions always have consequences. In spite of their having reconciled and made peace with each other, the descendants of Esau would constantly be at war with Israel all as a direct result of Esau's poor choices.

Regarding the decisions of Esau by the wives he married, Kent Hughes writes "A man's choice in marriage showcases his values and is always the determining factor in the tragedy of his life."

Still, God had made a promise that Esau would have a people who would become a nation, a promise that was given to his grandfather Abraham.

### **Genesis 17:1-8**

Included in the blessing given to Abraham regarding the promise of possessing the land and having descendants that could not be numbered, was the promise that through him other nations

would come through him. **Chapter 36** is the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham. The promise also noted that within these descendants and nations would be born kings. We read in **verse 31** "These were the kings who reigned in Edom before any Israelite king reigned."

Esau had become a nation, a nation none the less that over time would become the enemy of Israel.

We see in this passage the promise of his people, we also see the promise of his possessions.

### **B. The Promise of His Possessions – v.7-8**

Often when two groups of people with a large accumulation of flocks try to survive in the same land, disputes can break out. We saw it back in **13:6** when the herdsmen of Lot and the herdsmen of Abraham quarreled over rights to the land. Eventually they separated.

We also saw a dispute in **26:20** when the herdsmen of Gerar and the herdsmen of Isaac quarreled over the rights to a well for the purpose of watering their flocks. Isaac moved on.

The flocks of Jacob and Esau grew too large for the land to sustain them both. Esau also knew that the property rightfully belonged to Jacob as the recipient of the covenant blessing and as owner of the birthright. Everything Isaac owned legally belonged to Jacob.

Esau had been a hunter. He loved the hunt for wild game and was skillful in his trade. He smelled of the open field and a kindled fire. He was as rugged a woodsman as they come, the original Brawny man. His skin was darkened by the sun and weathered by the wind. He had a keen eye and a steady hand when it came to tracking down and bagging game.

Swindled out of the patriarchal blessing, which would have given him all the possessions of his father, Isaac could only resort in giving Esau a different blessing. It's found in **Genesis 27:39-40** where we read that rather than being able to enjoy the riches of what the earth had to offer or the dew of heaven, which was a way of saying that God

would bless, his descendants would live in a land less fertile than Canaan, where he was currently living. That passage also tells us that he would live by force.

**“Your dwelling will be away from the earth’s richness, away from the dew of heaven above. You will live by the sword and you will serve your brother. But when you grow restless, you will throw his yoke from off your neck.”**

The place where they moved, Seir, wasn’t the most fertile farmland. It would take work to raise crops in order to sustain his flocks. If you take out your imaginary map of Israel, let me see if I can point out where Seir is located. Imagine if you will the land of Canaan or Israel. Near the top of your map is the sea of Galilee. From the south end of this body of water is the Jordan River. To the far west is the Mediterranean Sea. Trace with your finger an imaginary line that travels south. That’s the Jordan River. Eventually you will come to another larger body of water, which is the Dead Sea or what is also called the Salt Sea. Below that is the country of Seir or Edom. This is the region where Aholibamah was from. She was a Horite, which means hole or cave. The region was made of limestone. In the southeastern region of the land of Seir is a place called Petra. It is the location of an almost impregnable fortress. Tourists today marvel at the tunnels and carvings of Petra in the land of Seir. This is the place where Esau moved his family and all his possessions.

At the end of the chapter we see a verse that speaks about the promise of his power.

### C. The Promise of His Power – v. 43

**“These were the chiefs of Edom, according to their settlements in the land they occupied.”**

The word **“occupied”** could mean the place they were living. We occupy a parcel of land on which our home sits. The church occupies a piece of land. My car is occupying space in the garage. Right now I occupy a seat at our dining room table. You are occupying a seat on the sofa or a rocker. If you fly, a little sign tells you that the lavatory is

occupied.

My laptop is occupying a space on the table.

That only means that you or something is occupying a place in a certain area.

But the word can also mean to take control of by military conquest or settlement. In essence, to take something by force. Many of you may remember several years ago the occupy Wall Street movement.

The verse we read just a moment ago indicated that Esau would live by the sword. It’s my belief that when Esau moved to the land of Seir, that sometime after he settled in the region he used force to establish his descendants as chiefs and kings. **Verse 31** says **“these kings reigned in Edom before any Israelite king reigned.”**

Esau was given a promise of people, possessions, and power. What we have seen in this overview of **chapter 36** shows not only the promises he was given but also points to the kind of person he was.

## II. THE PERSON OF ESAU

In the decisions that he made throughout his life we see two things.

We see his wickedness

We see his worldliness

### A. His Wickedness

Two events in his life stand out that depict his wickedness.

#### 1. Genesis 25:34

**“So Esau despised his birthright.”**

To despise means to feel contempt or deep revulsion for. It means to hate, to loath, to detest, to abhor, to scorn or to disdain. There is a deep-seated lack of respect for someone else, to feel that someone or something is not worthy of consideration.

That’s how Esau felt about his birthright. He had just come in from a long hunt. He was tired and hungry and as he drew near the tent, he could smell the savory stew Jacob was cooking up. **There are days I will be outside and can smell what Robyn has**

been cooking for dinner and it's not because it's burned. It might be chili or a pork loin that's been in the crock pot cooking all day.

Esau cared nothing for his birthright. All Esau cared about was his belly. Now the birthright was more than just getting a few trinkets a person might get in an inheritance. By virtue of being the firstborn son, all the rights and privileges of the birthright would be his. Other siblings would also get something, but he received a double portion of the inheritance and the one who was given the honor, the authority, the responsibility, in fact the name to carry on. In this case because there was a spiritual blessing that also went with the birthright given as a promise by God, that person would also receive those promises through whom would come the Messiah. Esau had no desire for anything spiritual.

**Kent Hughes concludes that "He had no sense of the spiritual, no eye for the unseen, no vision, only earth-bound dreams."**

The future promises of the covenant were of no value to a man who lived only for himself and only in the present. That's why he could so easily blow off his birthright and spiritual blessing and despise it. They meant nothing to him. The values of his parents were not his own and the reason he not only despised his birthright but also his parents by choosing to marry women of a pagan nature.

We have known people like that, maybe even within our own family where children had been taught the Word of God, but the things valued by parents in living as a Christian meant little to them. Heaven was a distant if not mythical place that seemed disconnected with anything that was real in the here and now. As they grew, they also began to despise their heritage, maybe not blatantly but little by little the glimmer of any spiritual ember began to flicker and so they casually dismissed the spiritual nurturing they had been taught growing up. And to the sorrow of parents, this son or daughter married someone with waning faith, someone outside the faith, someone without any faith. They began to go with the flow of the culture and began to live and raise their children to live for the here and now.

We pray for them that in time they will come to their senses and have a genuine repentant spirit where they return to the faith they were taught. It remains to be seen in many cases whether the spouse or children will follow. But often times, as Kent Hughes puts it, it is to the unbelieving and ignorant heart of an Edomite that we preach.

We'd like to think that growing up Esau listened to the stories of his father and grandfather about faith in God who had performed the miraculous, but instead of listening and believing he was more interested in other things that occupied his attention and grabbed his heart.

We can learn from the example of Esau that the ramifications of wrong decisions have lasting consequences. Let the opening words of the Psalmist burn into your heart and serve as a warning to avoid walking with those who would lead us down a road of wickedness, but also let them serve as a challenge to be rooted in the Word of God as the fortress by which we can stand strong against those forces that would otherwise pose a problem. **Psalm 1:1-2 "Happy is the man that walks not after the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord and in His law he meditates day and night."**

**Proverbs 1:10, 15-16 "My son, if sinners entice you, do not give in to them. My son, do not go along with them, do not set foot on their paths; for their feet rush into sin, they are swift to shed blood."**

The wickedness of his heart caused Esau to despise his birthright, which included a spiritual birthright. But the wickedness of his heart also caused Esau to decide to kill his brother.

## **2. Genesis 27:41**

**"Esau held a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing his father had given him. He said to himself, 'The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob'"**

**James 3:16 "For where envying and strife are,**

**there is confusion and every evil work.”**

**Amplified “For wherever there is jealousy (envy) and contention (rivalry and selfish ambition), there will also be confusion (unrest, disharmony, rebellion) and all sorts of evil and vile practices.”**

Hatred consumed Esau and he was bent on taking the life of his brother. Rage will always overpower a person to think and do what is irrational. But we are exhorted in **Hebrews 12:14-15** to **“Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.”**

But what did he care? Since he didn't follow God, life was cheap to him. We would do well to examine our heart and see if there is any spirit of Esau lingering where we have a disdain for what is spiritual, for what honors God, for what pleases God.

Not only do we see wickedness in the life of Esau, we also see his worldliness.

## **B. His Worldliness**

Worldliness has been defined in two different ways. One is the quality of being experienced and sophisticated. The other is to be concerned with material values or ordinary life rather than a spiritual existence.

It is the latter definition that is evident in Esau and consistent with how Scripture views worldliness. According to Kevin DeYoung, worldliness is what any particular culture does to make sin look normal and righteousness look strange.

Worldliness is drifting with the prevailing values and affections of the secular culture. It's whatever is right at the time.

It is living in the present without giving thought to eternity.

It is loving the creation more than the Creator.

It is believing the lie that something in this life, on this earth – other than God – can satisfy our innermost being.

The Apostle John gives us a warning at the close of his first epistle when he writes: **“Dear children, keep away from anything that might take God's place in your hearts.” 1 John 5:21**

Apologist C. S. Lewis writes that **“you and I have need of the strongest spell that can be found to wake us from the evil enchantment of worldliness.”**

The decisions that Esau made were typical of someone living after the desires of the heart, desires that are counter to the will and ways of God. He found the world to be friendly and more tolerant of his way of thinking and accepting of the 'do as you please we won't judge you' kind of life he wanted. Worldliness says you can do whatever you want because, after all, you're the boss, you make up your own rules of right and wrong.

John also warns in **I John 2:15-17** that we are not to love the world and its system or ways and says that if we love the world, if we practice worldliness then the love of God the Father is not in that person. He concludes by saying that all of that stuff will pass away, it's only temporary. That verse says that worldliness are things the flesh desires; things that the eye sees and wants, which we call covetousness; and pride, which is evident when we try to impress someone or wanting to be noticed or admired.

In a parable Jesus told about seed that was spread on the ground (**Luke 8:14**). The seed represents the Word of God. But in the story, He said that thorns grew up and choked out any spiritual root that was growing. Thorns represent things that cause us to be anxious, materialism or the pleasures of life. Esau allowed the things of the world to choke out anything spiritual in his life.

Jesus asked a pointed question that we would do well to ponder, one that Esau ignored. **“What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?” (Matthew 16:26)**

**Is an eternity of torment worth a few years of temporary pleasure?**

John Phillips states that “like Lot before him, Esau moved away from the place of fellowship with the people of God persuaded he could find more congenial company with the world.”

We read in **James 4:4-5** that if we choose to be friends with the world, then we have summarily become the enemy of God. Then in **verse 7** James says that the cure for worldliness is threefold. First, we must submit ourselves to God. Rather than be self-centered we become God centered.

The second is to resist the devil by avoiding those things would pull us away from our affection and toward the world.

James says the third thing is to draw near to God. We do that through reading the Bible regularly, practicing or obeying what we read, prayer, getting together regularly with other Christians for the purpose of mutual encouragement to love and good works (**Hebrews 10:24-25**). When we draw near to God the natural result is that the world will lose its hold on us.

Paul stated it like this in **Romans 12:2**. Worldliness is when we are molded or conformed into its image, taking on its characteristics, doing what it says is okay. What James describes as submitting and drawing near to God, Paul describes as our being transformed by renewing our mind with the word of God. So that if we want to shun worldliness, then we must alter our thinking by God’s Word.

Worldliness stole the heart of Demas causing him to lose his love for God because he loved the things of the world more (**II Timothy 4:10**).

If we are to combat worldliness then we will take seriously the admonition in Scripture to pursue after godliness (**II Corinthians 6:17; Titus 2:12; I Peter 1:14-16; I John 3:2-3**).

**I John 5:4** says that it is by our faith that helps us to overcome the world and its pull.

**II Corinthians 5:17** says that it is in recognizing we are a new creation in Christ and that old things of the flesh are past.

**Colossians 3:1-2** tells us that worldliness can be overcome by setting our affection, our heart on things that are above, things that are eternal rather than things that are temporary.

More than just a list of names, this chapter gives us a glimpse into the window of a life that was overcome by worldliness and the consequences of what resulted from his decisions to abandon God and follow after the world. Let his example be a warning and a wake-up call that would drive us to submit to God and draw near to Him.

**Chapter 36** is a record not only of Esau’s lineage, but also of his life. It is a glimpse of choices made along the way.

Let me conclude the message with the same poem we ended with last week. It is just as fitting.

You’re writing a gospel a chapter each day,  
By the deeds that you and the words that you say.  
Men read what you write whether faithless or true.  
Say, what is the gospel according to you?