

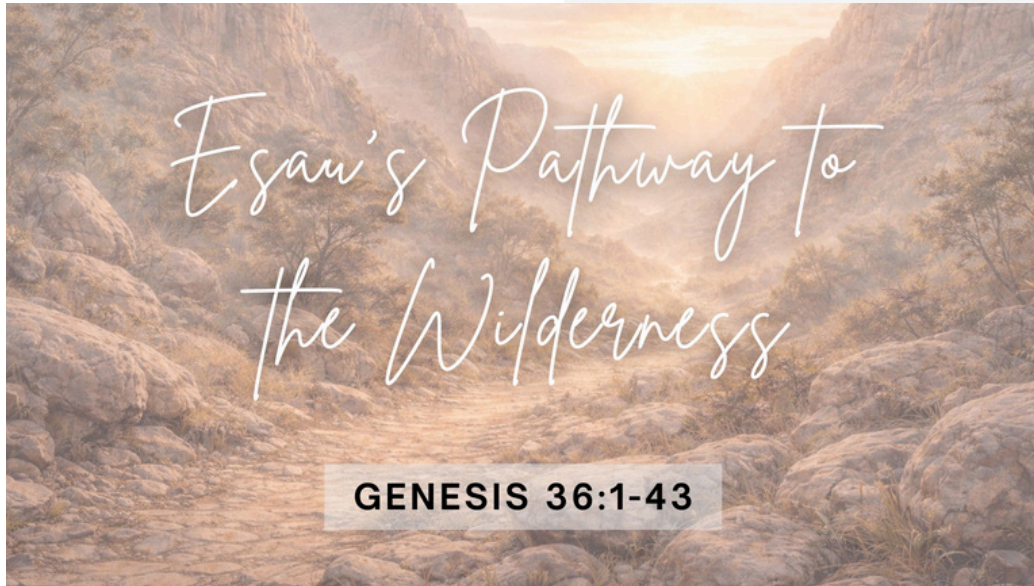
# CCLEB SERMON NOTES



SUNDAY JANUARY 10, 2026  
GENESIS 36:1-43

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## ESAU'S PATHWAY TO THE WILDERNESS



Have you ever watched someone you love drift away from the Lord and they end up in the wilderness, and you wondered how they got there? And you think to yourself, how did that happen so quickly? Its disturbing isn't it? Maybe you have even had those questions retrospectively about yourself?

I know I have had seasons of being close to the Lord and then seasons of being away from the Lord in the wilderness. Those seasons of being in the wilderness were dark, lonely, and always really dry. Those wilderness seasons felt unbearably long, usually involve questioning, big questions, sometimes even wondering what's real. I don't like those wilderness seasons. But in my reflection of those wilderness seasons I have seen that sometimes the Lord in his love has led me into the wilderness for his purposes of shaping and molding me.

However more often than not, I have put myself in the wilderness away from the Lord by my choices, by the steps that I have taken away from the Lord. Now by God's grace every one of those seasons of me being away from the Lord in the wilderness all have led me back to the Lord where there is a new season of life, and flourishing. Reminds me of the cycle in **Psalms 23**.

That cycle has happened often enough for me to know that one day I didn't just wake up and I was in the wilderness, but rather there were traceable steps that I chose that resulted in me being in the wilderness. And as I have heard some of your stories, I've learned that many of your traceable steps that resulted in you being in the wilderness are similar to my steps, and as we look at **chapter 36** you will see they are similar to Esau's steps that led him to the wilderness as well.

So let's look at Esau's steps that lead Esau to the wilderness. The goal here for us today is that if we can see these common traceable steps that lead to the wilderness, perhaps then we avoid the wilderness, at least the wilderness that results from our own choices. And maybe even then help others avoid...

Now in Esau's case, the wilderness where Esau ends up away from the Lord is both a literal physical wilderness and a spiritual wilderness. With there being both a physical wilderness and a spiritual wilderness for Esau, then there were two journeys for Esau. The one journey is Esau's choice to physically journey away from God and the land of promise, to the physical wilderness of Edom. The other journey that Esau chose is the spiritual journey away from the Lord into the spiritual wilderness. In Esau's case these two journeys into the wilderness overlap but were not simultaneous.

Esau's spiritual journey to the wilderness began while he was a young man living in Canaan, in his father Isaac's house, and it began with Esau's contempt or despise for his rights as firstborn. **Genesis 25:34** Yes this is review but it is important.

### In near eastern culture, for Esau to have contempt for his birthright meant that:

- Esau rejected Abraham's covenant inheritance.
- Esau rejected the spiritual headship over the family of Jacob.
- Esau rejected the passing of blessing to the next generation. In essence then Esau rejected the order that God had put in place, thus rejecting God.

Esau was firstborn by God's design, that was the divine order. Esau had the firstborn birthright by divine order, and then Esau rejected the birthright. In essence then Esau was rejecting God. What happens when someone rejects God? Wilderness, the opposite of Eden.

So Esau's journey into the spiritual wilderness began with Esau rejecting the birth order, and the birthright, and responsibility that came with it from the Lord, thus Esau was rejecting the Lord. And with Esau's rejecting all of that, Esau was then - rejecting the identity of Esau that God gave to him, chose for him. If you reject the identity God gave you, you must become something else - another identity. And if it not the identity that God chose for you, then what you become will be significantly less than what God in his love and sovereignty intended for you. Think that through.

For Esau, in rejecting God, he rejected the identity of Esau and then became Edom. The genealogy of **Genesis 36** hi-lights Esau's journey from being Esau, what God chose for him, to being Edom the identity Esau chose for himself.

Let's look at this. Note in **verse 1** Esau has two names.

## Esau Has Two Names

"Esau" means "hairy, rough" from **Genesis 25:25** reflecting his skin texture and color at birth. And his second name is "Edom" which means "**red**", which was the color of the "**red** stew" that Esau sold his birthright for in **Genesis 25:30**.

And in looking at the rest of the genealogy, the author is sure mentions both of Esau's names several more times reinforcing that Esau became Edom.

Now these are the records of the generations of **Esau** (that is, **Edom**).  
**Genesis 36:1**

So **Esau** lived in the hill country of Seir; Esau is **Edom**.  
**Genesis 36:8**

These are the sons of **Esau** (that is, **Edom**), and these are their chiefs.  
**Genesis 36:19**

chief Magdiel, and chief Iram. These are the chiefs of **Edom** (that is, **Esau**, the father of the Edomites), according to their settlements in the land of their possession.  
**Genesis 36:43**

And note that in last one in **verse 43** the order of the two names is reversed indicating that the journey Esau chose resulted in Esau leaving his identity as Esau, and now by **verse 43** he is "Edom" and that transition from Esau to Edom is completed.

Esau is no longer known by being tied to Abraham and the covenant, Esau is no longer the brother of Jacob the heir to the Abrahamic covenant, Esau is no longer tied to Canaan the land of promise. Rather Esau is now Edom in the land of Edom. And Edom and his descendants the "Edomites", will stand in opposition to the family and descendants of Jacob, the Israelites. Which means then we come back to a repeating theme from early Genesis of brothers in opposition to each other.

So let's consider more traceable steps in **Genesis 36** that resulted in Esau being in the wilderness now with a new identity as Edom.

**Genesis 36:2** tells us that Esau married the daughters of Canaan. Esau first rejected God's order, rejected his God given identity, and now we see Esau in **verse 2** marrying young women from Canaan. Now while that may seem innocent, after all the local young women were the available women to marry, Esau's marriage of Canaanite women was significant. We see later in **Exodus 34:15-16** the significance of this.

Now the Lord's prohibition about marrying foreign women was not about ethnicity or race at all. Rather, the prohibition on marrying foreign women was about potential negative impact on spiritual loyalty to the Lord. Meaning that foreign wives had a powerful ability to lead the Israelite men's hearts away from the Lord to their other gods. In Israel's history sometimes marrying foreign women had devastating spiritual consequences, think about Solomon whose foreign wives led his heart away from the Lord.



But for Esau when he married the local Canaanite women, he had already rejected the LORD, so he was most likely marrying into their families and their families god's - lower case "g". On indication of that is the name of Esau's second wife mentioned in **verse 2** Oholibamah. Her name means "tent of the high place" typically associated with pagan cultic worship sites. Keep in mind that name meanings in ancient near east cultures were hugely significant. So from the name of Esau's wife we have a pretty good idea of the pagan spirituality of the family Esau was marrying into - they even named their daughter after a pagan religious site. Esau's marriages to foreign women was continued spiritual compromise that led away from the Lord and the Lord's promised covenant. Esau chose this compromise, so compromise was a traceable step towards the wilderness.

## Oholibamah

Her name means "tent of the high place". Typically associated with pagan cultic worship sites.



So let's talk about compromise as a traceable step that leads to the wilderness. There is a fairly common progression of compromise. It's not exact for everyone but I think you will recognize the logic and sequence of this.

First. When one holds a belief or a truth and then begins to think there is flexibility or nuance in the application of the belief, as in who it applies to - that can lead to compromise. For example- for Solomon - the Old Testament law in **Exodus** was crystal clear about not marrying foreign wives because of negative spiritual consequences. So at what point was that not crystal clear for Solomon? At what point did Solomon say to himself, "those rigid rules don't apply to me?" Was it when Solomon saw himself above the law? Was it when Solomon thought he was entitled to more freedom of choice for a wife than what God said was best for him?

## Progression of Compromise #1

When one holds a belief or a truth and then begins to think there is flexibility or nuance in the application of the belief, as in who it applies to - that *can* lead to compromise.

And look where Solomon ended up spiritually- in the wilderness - spiritually, where it was dark - lonely - dry. Compromise from what God has put in order, or what God has chosen as best for us, is a cognitive shift or thinking change from conviction to preference.

# Compromise

Compromise from what God has put in order, or what God has said is best for us, is a cognitive shift or thinking change from conviction to preference.

Second: Compromise sometimes happens when intense emotions or circumstances influence us to make a rule exception. Were Esau and Solomon overcome with sexual desire for the off-limits foreign women? Or was there such great political pressure from foreign leaders wanting alliances that they succumbed to that pressure and agreed to intermarriage? Or were they just scared they wouldn't survive in a hostile land without the alliances? If any of those were true for them then when the emotional or circumstantial pressure increased, rather than trusting in God to protect and provide, they compromised.

## Progression of Compromise #2

Compromise sometimes happen when emotions or circumstances influences us to make a rule exception.

Compromise also happens when one argues towards a desired outcome, not arguing towards biblical truth. In essence then when one argues towards a desired outcome, life became ruled by justifications - convincing yourself that you are right - rather than biblical reasoning. For example if you makes a decision to have something you know you shouldn't, you will argue in favor of what you want justifying it, and argue against what the bible says.

## Progression of Compromise #3

Another step in the progression of compromise is arguing towards a desired outcome, not arguing towards biblical truth.

Common justifications for things we want are: “no one is being harmed”, “God understands my situation”, “the greater good requires this”, “no one will ever know”, “I deserve or need this” etc. All of those justifications needs to be held captive to the truth of this book. So compromise is a traceable step that leads to the wilderness

Now the end of the progression of compromise is creating distance from accountability. This is a clear traceable step. Typically creating distance from accountability looks like a person intentionally distancing themselves away from people who love them enough to challenge their thinking. Like moving away from your christian community. And invariably when that person distances themselves from the accountability, they then draw closer to people that affirm their godless choices. That combination, distancing oneself from accountability and drawing close to those who affirm the new choices happen in tandem and are traceable steps that lead to the wilderness.

## Progression of Compromise #4

Another step in the progression of compromise is creating distance from accountability then drawing near to people that affirm one's choices.

That distancing from accountability, which for Esau was distancing from God and the covenant, distancing from the land of promise, and distancing from God's people - is exactly what we see in **Genesis 36:6-8**.

If you noticed - the telling of Esau's departing from his brother Jacob, echoes the story of Lot departing from Abraham in **Genesis 13:6** This separating of Esau and Jacob needs to be seen in the light of Esau separating himself from the people of God and God's promises and covenant and God's covenant faithfulness.

So when Esau separates himself from Jacob, distances himself from Jacob and and the accountability of God -the text tells us Esau now Edom goes to the hill country of Seir.



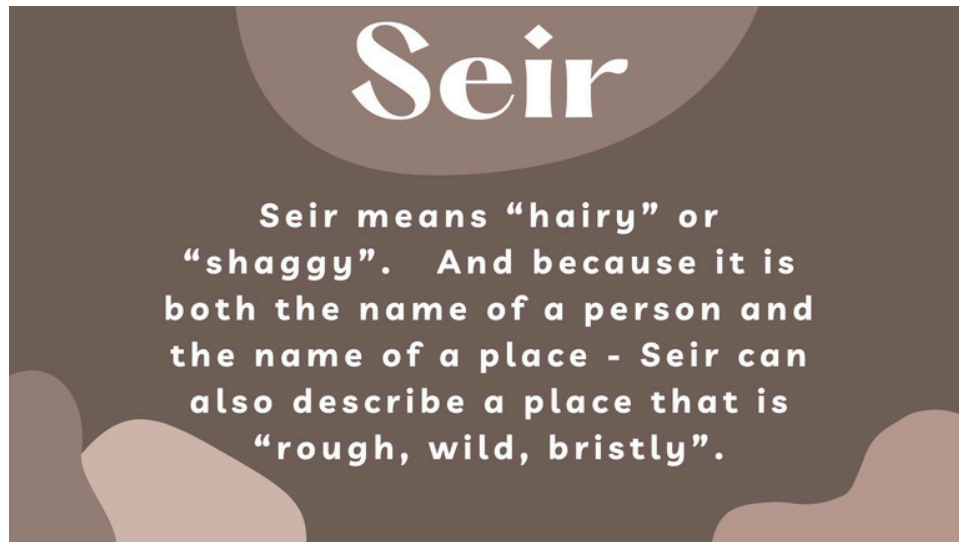
Seir is east of southern Judah. East. We already know that the direction East in the Genesis story always implies “away from God, away from his covenant promises, and away from God's people.”



Adam & Eve moving east from Eden, Cain settling east of them, Noah's descendants settled east in Babel, Lot settled East of Canaan, and Hagar & Ishmael settled east of Abraham.

So if Esau went east distancing himself from God and God's people, who would Esau draw near to that would be more likely to affirm his choices? Those who have already left the presence of God. The descendants of Lot who became the Moabites. The descendants of Ishmael - the Ishmaelites - in northern Arabia etc.

So Esau in **verse 8** settled East in a mountainous place called Seir. Seir means "hairy" or "shaggy". And because it is both the name of a person and the name of a place - Seir can also describe a place that is "rough, wild, bristly". What is interesting is that Esau's name also means "hairy" so there is a little bit of poetic irony or poetic justice - Hairy Esau lives in hairy Seir - which is in a literal wilderness.



So now we have Esau named Edom in a spiritual wilderness and also in a literal physical wilderness. And note **verse 8** says "Esau is Edom".



Ok, so we have only covered the first eight verses of the genealogy of **chapter 36**. We haven't really even talked about the descendants of Edom yet...so here is my encouragement, strap in and reach for more chocolate. Let's Go!

Now for **verse 9-43** there are two more traceable steps that resulted in Edom in the wilderness. The Edomites became self reliant in protection and self reliant in power. Self reliance is pride. Self reliance says "I don't need God I can do this on my own".

If you live in the wilderness among other hostile nations you need protection and power. The Edomites rejected God and the covenant and which means they didn't have the LORD to protect them or fight for them, so they chose to be self-reliant for protection and power.

And interestingly their self reliance for protection and power is reflected in where they lived. The Edomites lived in Seir as we see in **Verse 9**. Mount Seir was high and rocky and it offered natural protection. Jeremiah's prophecy against the Edomites in **Jeremiah 49:16** is directly related to the Edomites self reliance and pride in their ability to protect themselves.



In contrast the Psalmist says in **Psalms 18:2**. What is your trust for protection in?

And when the Edomites chose to protect themselves and fight for themselves instead of the LORD doing that for them then we would expect to see their social structure be organized around power. That is what we see in **verse 15 NASB**. We see the term “chiefs” 13x which denotes a structure and organization by tribes, with a chief in power. While a tribal structure is similar to Israel's later twelve tribes, Israel's tribal structure never uses the word “chief”.

And Edom's tribal structure reflecting power grows through generation. By **verse 31** Edom's tribal structures had evolved from being led by chiefs to then also being led by “kings” as we see in **verse 31** Note these are then “kings of cities” not tribes. So more emphasis on power structures in Edom's descendants.

And just an odd thing **verse 33-39**, when one of the Edomite kings died or was killed not once were the kings replaced by their son as successor - so no dynasties. In contrast, Israel's kings, which came several hundred years later were all about a chosen lineage from generation to generation, the line of David.

Now let me compare Edom to Israel. While Edom had a power structure that went from clans to tribes with chiefs, to cities with kings, Jacob's family, the Israelites went into slavery in Egypt for 400 years. What was God doing? God's intent was to ground the Israelites in his covenant promises, reveal to them His covenant faithfulness thru their hardships by showing them that he would provide, protect and fight for them, so that the Israelites wouldn't reject him like the Edom did.

So let me summarize **verse 9-43**. The Edomites in rejection of God were about self reliance for power & self protection. God intended the Israelites to be about promise. If you reject God's blessing and promise all you can turn to is self reliance for protection and power to survive. But when you trust God, you have something way stronger than the power and protection of this world. You have God and the promises of God. And as we have seen for Noah, Ab, Isaac and Jacob, God in his covenant faithfulness delivers.

Closing thoughts for your meditation and application:

The goal here for us today is to see the common traceable steps that lead to the wilderness. And in seeing those steps perhaps it may help us avoid the wilderness, at least the wilderness that results from our own choices. Here are the traceable steps that led Esau to be Edom in the Wilderness.



# Traceable Steps

- Rejecting what God has chosen for you leads to the wilderness.
- Compromise leads to the wilderness.
- Distancing yourself from God and his people will lead to the wilderness.
- Self reliance for protection and power, which is pride, leads to being in the wilderness.

1. Esau rejected his God given identity as the firstborn - the life and role, God chose for him. If you reject the identity God gave you, you must become something else other than what God chose for you like Esau becoming Edom. So generalize that, Rejecting what God has chosen for you leads to the wilderness.

2. Esau compromised when he married foreign woman who served other gods. Compromise leads to the wilderness.

3. Esau distanced himself from God, God's covenant, and the people of God who would hold him accountable. In distancing himself from them, Esau drew near to others that would affirm his godless choices. Distancing yourself from God and his people will lead to the wilderness.

4. Esau, now Edom, became self reliant which is pride. Esau rejected God's covenant which offered him land, protection and the power of God. Self reliance for protection and power, which is pride, leads to being in the wilderness.

## Repentance

1. Humbling yourself and committing to doing what God says to do in his word - without compromise.
2. Humbling yourself and drawing near to followers of God who love you and hold you accountable.
3. Humbling yourself and not being self reliant pertaining to protecting yourself and fighting for yourself, providing for your self. Let God be your warrior, and shield, protector and provider.

So how do you get from the wilderness back to where God wants you to be with him? Humble yourself before the Lord and repent, repent meaning to turn back to God. Repentance that leads out of the wilderness may look like:

1. Humbling yourself and committing to doing what God says to do in his word - without compromise.
2. Humbling yourself and drawing near to followers of God who love you and hold you accountable.
3. Humbling yourself and not being self reliant pertaining to protecting yourself and fighting for yourself, providing for your self. Let God be your warrior, and shield, protector and provider.

# BONUS

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## CONTENT:

1. Edomite names don't reflect God. One of the differences we see in this chapter between the descendants of Jacob and the descendants of Esau is the meaning of names. The Edomites names throughout this chapter are anchored in things like physical traits, geography, sensory, status, or appearance. For example "Seir" means "hairy". This is a clear indication of the Edomites having rejected the LORD - not even Edomite names reflect God. If you do see an Edomite name with an "el" in it as in "Reuel", the "el" most likely means "god" lower case "g". Reuel means: "friend of god", or "friend of the gods". In contrast Israelites names were often anchored in their relationships with God, divine encounters, God's promises, and God's actions. For example "Elijah" - "my God is the LORD". "Daniel" - "God is my judge", etc..
2. Was Esau's spiritual journey always negative? There was a season earlier in Esau's life that looked spiritually promising when Esau welcomed his brother Jacob back into his life in **chapter 33**, and that reconciliation between brothers was beautiful and prophetic. However, I went back and looked at the words Esau said while reconciling with Jacob, not once does Esau mention God, or give credit to God. Not once! However in contrast, during the same encounter, Jacob gives credit to God three times. Esau - 0, Jacob -3. I missed that when I studied for **chapter 33**. That changes my perspective now of that encounter. It seems more likely that God had for that season softened Esau's heart so that the heir of the covenant Jacob would be protected while arriving back in the promise land.
3. Were all marriages to foreign woman negative? There were a few times that Israelite men married foreign woman and there was not negative spiritual consequences, as in Salmon's marriage of Rahab from Jericho, or Boaz's marriage of Ruth the Moabitess. Those women married into the tribes of Israel, and made the Lord their God. This is reflected in Ruth's famous quote in **Ruth 1:16** "your people will be my people and your God will be my God". Rahab and Ruth, foreign women, were blessed to be in the lineage of Jesus.
4. What is the Genesis history of moving east? What direction did Lot go when he separated himself from Abraham and the covenant? East. **Genesis 13:11** What direction did Hagar and Ishmael settle? East! **Genesis 25:18** What direction did the descendants of Noah go when they separated themselves from Noah and the covenant? East. **Genesis 11:1** What direction did Cain go when he separated himself from Adam and the God of covenant? **Genesis 4:16** What direction did Adam and Eve go after Eden? East. **Genesis 3:23-34**.
5. On God's prohibition of Israelites marrying foreign women see also **Deuteronomy 7:3-4**.