

## READ

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Genesis 36

## REFLECT

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Reading scripture isn't always pleasurable or enlightening, and such is the case with Genesis 36. Esau's family line isn't particularly interesting for modern readers because we have no context for these people and why they may be important, other than their relation to Esau. And, really, much of that context has been lost to history, so it becomes impossible to know. Still, it's part of our faith, so we should read it and seek to learn whatever lesson may be present.

Earlier in Genesis, when Esau had refused Jacob's gifts, he said it was because he had plenty already. Here we see how true that was – apparently the land couldn't support both Jacob and Esau's animals, so Esau had to find a new place to settle. You might ask why it was Esau that found a new place to live instead of Jacob, Esau was the older brother, after all. But Jacob took his place as the family heir when he stole Esau's blessing (and when Esau sold him his birthright for a bowl of stew), so choice of place was his, and he remained in the promised land because of God's renewing the covenant with him. Esau didn't have as many wives as his brother, nor did he have as many sons. That didn't prevent him, however, from having a prodigious family line. Whereas most of the names that are mentioned in the long list have no meaningful interest for us, they were important in the lives of Israelites because they were the names of neighbors they had real interactions with. There are two names, though, that are of special note: Bela, son of Beor, and Hadad, son of Bedad. It has been thought that Bela may be Balaam, who, in Numbers 22, was hired to curse Israel because the Midianites and Moabites were afraid of Israel's growth. That story is one of huge importance because Balaam refused to curse Israel, and not just refused, but blessed Israel and predicted Moab's downfall. Likewise, Hadad is thought to be the same Hadad that David fought against, and who had to flee to Egypt to save his life (1 Kings 11). Whereas Balaam refused to act against his kin, Hadad did, and it cost him greatly. It's not exciting to read these long lists of names, but when we get the greater context, it becomes far more interesting. It's yet another place where our ancestors in faith heard that God was keeping God's promise to them.

## REACT

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- Do you have an expectation that every scripture reading will speak to you in some deep way? How can you reframe your reading when scripture doesn't live up to that expectation so that you can still find its value?
- Scripture is infused, even in the most mundane places, with signs that God keeps God's promises. It's true in this simple list of family as it is in other places. In our lives, when it's hard to remember that God is in control and God will not forget us or let us go, how do you remind yourself? How might you look for signs of God's activity?

## RESPOND

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**Looking for God's work in the world:** *When the land couldn't support the extreme wealth (in animals) of Jacob and Esau, Jacob, who had inherited the covenantal promise, was the one who stayed. When Esau's descendants stayed faithful to both God and their ancestors, they lived successful lives. But when those ancestors made themselves enemies of Israel, they found themselves in a heap of trouble. God's promises were being kept then, and they continue to be kept today. There are times when it can be really hard to trust in those promises, just as it's hard to even recognize that God is still working in our lives. One exercise that can help us focus on God's continued activity is to look for specific things and remember God's promises in that moment. Maybe it's a rainbow in the sky, a reminder of Noah and God's promise to never flood the earth again. Maybe it's an eagle (or other majestic bird), reminder of the promise found in Isaiah 40. Maybe it's in a blooming flower, a reminder of the promise of Easter. Whatever you want your reminder to be, there will be something that can remind you that God is working today, as God always has, to meet us and keep us. As you recognize that one thing, expand it to another, and then another. Keep going, because you'll soon find that there are signs of God's love all around in every moment.*