

OBADIAH

By Mike Burnham

This is the shortest book of the Old Testament, having only one chapter and twenty-one verses. It has one subject, the judgment on Edom, though it does end showing the contrast between Edom's judgment and Israel's final salvation. Obadiah's words are not intended to be limited to the Edom. While what he says concerning their destruction is to be regarded as literally true, they are also taken as the type of nations hostile to God, and their overthrow prefigures the judgment of the Gentiles at the end of the age.

We don't know anything about Obadiah or the date of his book, although the destruction of Jerusalem and the captivity mentioned in these verses would appear to place it around 586 BC.

It also shows the conflict between the man of God and the man of the world.

To better understand Obadiah we need to understand Esau, the father of the Edomites. Genesis 25:21-23 introduces us to the struggle which began in Rebecca's womb and did not end for centuries.

21* And Isaac intreated the LORD for his wife, because she was barren: and the LORD was intreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived. 22 And the children struggled together within her; and she said, If *it be* so, why *am* I thus? And she went to enquire of the LORD. 23 And the LORD said unto her, Two nations *are* in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and *the one* people shall be stronger than *the other* people; and the elder shall serve the younger.

When Rebecca inquired of the Lord concerning the struggle taking

place within her, He said; "*Two nations are in thy bowels.*" The book of Obadiah shows the final scene of that conflict between these two brothers or two nations.

At the time Esau sold his birthright to Jacob for a mess of red pottage he obtained the name Edom, which means red (vv-29-34; Heb. 12:16-17).

29. And Jacob sold pottage: and Esau came from the field, and he *was* faint: 30 And Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red *pottage*; for I *am* faint: therefore was his name called Edom. And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright. 32 And Esau said, Behold, I *am* at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me? 33 And Jacob said, Swear to me this day; and he swore unto him: and he sold his birthright unto Jacob. 34 Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentiles; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised *his* birthright.

Verse thirty-four says that he despised his birthright even though he knew that the birthright from Abraham downwards carries the divine promises of great spiritual and future blessing. Esau shows the natural man and his despising of that which is spiritual. A profane man is one with no spiritual perception; one who is independent of God.

The next step in Esau's journey from all that is Godly was his marriage of heathen wives (Gen. 26:34).

34* And Esau was forty years old when he took to wife Judith the daughter of Beerli the Hittite, and Bashemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite: 35 Which were a grief of mind unto Isaac and to Rebekah.

Later he married one of the daughters of Ishmael (Gen. 28:8-9). He deliberately did this knowing it would displease his father. Parental ideals, religious traditions, and even the commands of God were meaningless to this man of the world.

Jacob first bought the birthright from Esau for a mess of pottage and then stole from Esau the blessing of Isaac, his father, to the firstborn, though subtlety and deceit. This just made Esau hate Jacob more until in Gen. 27:41 he threatens to kill Jacob.

Genesis 36:8-9 tells us that; "*Esau dwelt in Mount Seir*".

8 Thus dwelt Esau in mount Seir: Esau *is* Edom. 9 And these *are* the generations of Esau the father of the Edomites in mount Seir:

Mount Seir is not just one mountain, but a mountainous region extending from the south of the Dead Sea to the Gulf of Akabah. It is a narrow stretch of land running approximately one hundred miles north and south by thirty miles east and west. It was named Seir after Seir the Horite (Gen. 14:6; 36:20), which means rock-dweller.

20* These *are* the sons of Seir the Horite, who inhabited the land;

Esau's descendants dwelt in Seir (Deut. 2:12);

12* The Horims also dwelt in Seir beforetime; but the children of Esau succeeded them, when they had destroyed them from before them, and dwelt in their stead; as Israel did unto the land of his possession, which the LORD gave unto them.

It's main city in the north is Bozrah (I think this is where President Clinton witnessed Shimon Peres and King Hussian sign their peace treaty). Farther south was the city of Temen, which was protected by the fortress of Petra (Sela). Petra was the Edomite capital during the days of the Hebrew Kings. Edom was later called Idumea and the Herod's of New Testament times were from the Edomic remnant in Idumea. After the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD the Edomites passed finally from the pages of history.

Esau's hatred and worldliness was passed from one generation to the

next. Nor did his descendants ever lose the spirit of murder. But God commanded the children of Israel not to hate the Edomites (Deut. 23:7). When Moses requested permission to pass through the territory of Mount Seir on their return from Egypt the Edomites denied them permission (Num. 20:14-21). They even gloried in the slaughter of Jacob's descendants. They became the bitterest of enemies of Israel. They lived by the sword and they had no greater delight than to witness the persecution of God's people and the destruction of their holy places. Conflicts continued between Edom and Israel to the time of the Babylonian captivity, at which time the descendants of Esau rose up against the already defeated descendants of Jacob. It is against such a nation that Obadiah pronounces God's judgment.

THE DESTRUCTION OF EDOM

VERSE ONE

Rumor....or Report.

Ambassador....any agent, visible or invisible, sent by God.

Her....Edom

VERSE TWO

I have made thee small....the verb here refers not to past action but to a certain future action. This nation was full of pride, thinking of herself as a great and respected nation, but when God has made her small she will be despised by other nations for trying to be something she is not.

VERSES THREE AND FOUR

Four things are mentioned in these verses that picture nations today and the flesh or the natural man.

1. Pride....*The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee*....Edom's estimate of herself was inflated out of proportion to her real power because of the deception of her heart. (Gal.6:3 *For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself*). Because of Edom's pride, she was brought low. It's far better to be humble that God may exalt us.

2. Dependence on material things....*Thou that dwell in the clefts of the rock*", Edom had come to depend heavily upon the protection of her mountain fortresses. Petra, for instance, could only be approached through a narrow, rock-walled ravine, very deep and more than a mile long, plus the city itself was cut into the rock; cliffs rising up to 2000 feet. It was so inaccessible that treasures were brought there for storage and for transshipment in every direction for safety. How much does the U.S. depend upon her position, bounded on two sides by vast oceans, and weaker nations to the north and south? How much does she depend upon her weapons of war, her riches. One of these days God may bring her down and when and if that happens we all know we will be despised by the nations of the world.

3. Defiance....*Who shall bring me down to the ground?* Edom had come to believe that no enemy could successfully invade its defenses. But the nations of the world, made up of natural men, do not think of God as an enemy and therein is their downfall (*Prov. 16:18 Pride goeth before*

destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall).

4. Ambition....*Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle and set thy nest among the stars.* Satan was ambitious. In Isaiah 14:13-14 we read the five "I wills" of Satan. Job has this to say about the ambitious 5. *That the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment?* 6. *Though his excellency mount up to the heavens, and his head reach unto the clouds;* 7. *Yet he shall perish for ever like his own dung: they which have seen him shall say, Where is he?*

I will bring thee down...If it was possible for Edom to do these things mentioned in verse four it would not put him out of God's reach.

VERSE FIVE

If thieves came to thee...Obadiah describes Edom's future punishment in contrast to the thieves and robbers which they were and knew about. He tells them that they would be better off if your homes were overrun by thieves and robbers and your vineyards by grape gathers. At least when they are finished there are some gleanings left.

How art thou cut off....or "*O how you will be destroyed.*" Those that God will bring against Edom will be much worse than common thieves and robbers.

VERSE SIX

The things of Esau searched out....The name Esau speaks of the Edomite nation as a whole. The enemy will not attack and then go on. They

will stay and search out their holes in the rocks and cliffs, tearing apart their cities the enemy will take even the people and treasures that are well hidden.

VERSES SEVEN THROUGH NINE

All the men of thy confederacy...Those nations Edom trusted, were at peace with, shared food with. These so-called allies will deceive the Edomites and with treachery lay a snare and prevail against them. The Edomites were attacked, disgraced, and despised by the very people whose friendship they courted in preference to that of their close kin, the Jew.

There is none understanding in him...God had destroyed the understanding and wisdom of the nation of Edom so they couldn't see the deception and treachery of their so-called allies that God's purpose would be fulfilled. Eliphaz, the chief opponent of Job in argument, was a Temanite and the representative of human wisdom (Job 2:1). Jeremiah mentions the wisdom of the Temanites in a passage that is almost the same as this one in Obadiah (Jer. 49:7-22).

THE REASON FOR THEIR DESTRUCTION

I think these next few verses are referring to when the Babylonians came and conquered Judah and took the people away to Babylon. Jerusalem and the Temple were plundered and destroyed.

VERSE TEN

For thy violence against thy brother Jacob....The reason they are being destroyed is because of their violence against God's people. The name *Jacob* brings out the relationship between the Edomites and the Israelites. They were not only brothers but twin brothers. This should have made the ties between them even stronger and they should have wanted to help and support each other. Instead, Edom, thrived on the misfortune of their brother nation and even worse gave active support to her enemies. The name Jacob also brings out the difference between the two brothers. Esau was profane, seeking his pleasure in the world, Jacob, on the other hand, was interested and sought after that which was spiritual. And as scripture says about Isaac and Ishmael in Galatians 4:29; "*But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now.*" The same holds true with Jacob and Esau and their descendants and will always hold true.

Shame shall cover thee....The shame of everlasting destruction. They thought themselves a great nation, indestructible, and suddenly they are nothing.

Cut off for ever....They were cut down by Babylon, and by the Nabataeans, an Arabian tribe, and in 312 BC by Antigonus, one of the Generals of Alexander the Great, and in the second century BC by the Maccabaeus of Israel, and completely ruined in 70 AD when the small Edomite remnant were almost entirely wiped out by the Romans. The survivors took refuge among the desert tribes, into which they became absorbed according to Josephus. In the third century AD Origen, a Theologian, spoke of them as a people whose name and language had perished.

The complete annihilation of the Edomite nation points to a significant distinction between God's judgments on His people and His judgments upon

those against Him. He judges His own people to discipline and correct them, bringing them back to Himself. His judgments on the ungodly are to separate them from Him.

VERSES ELEVEN THROUGH THIRTEEN

The Edomites not only stood by and gazed with pleasure while the Babylonians looted Jerusalem and carried away captives, but they joined Jacob's enemies and assisted them in their plundering and murder and rejoiced at their destruction with boasts and insults (Psa. 137:1, 7).

1* By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.

7* Remember, O LORD, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; who said, *Rase it, rase it, even* to the foundation thereof.

In the day of their calamity....This phrase is used three times in verse thirteen. When words or phrases are repeated it is to emphasize and show importance about what is being spoken. Here the repetition suggests the enormousness of the calamity, that made the sin of the Edomites even worse and their judgment more severe.

VERSE FOURTEEN

Stood in the crossway...Edom at first stands by, as a joyful spectator, then participates in the looting of the city, and now is blocking the escape routes from the city, killing and capturing the fleeing survivors, and delivering them up to the Chaldeans for slaves.

VERSE FIFTEEN

For the day of the Lord is near...Prophecy in scripture usually has a near and a far-sighted application. In these prophecies the near or immediate fulfillment doesn't completely fulfill the prophecy. For instance,

in Isaiah 61:1-3 there is a prophecy of the coming of Jesus. This was partially fulfilled in His first coming, especially in the spiritual sense (Luke 4:18-19).

Upon all the Heathen...Obadiah tells Edom that she isn't the only one to be judged. The time will come when all the nations will be judged, and they shall be judged on the same thing that Edom is to be judged.

As thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee...Edom and all the nations will be judged for their deeds, especially their deeds against God's people.

Thy reward shall return....The law of retribution. Psalms 7:16;

16* His mischief shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down upon his own pate.

Like a stone cast towards heaven. In Esther 9:25, speaking about Haman says,

24* Because Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had devised against the Jews to destroy them, and had cast Pur, that *is*, the lot, to consume them, and to destroy them; 25 But when *Esther* came before the king, he commanded by letters that his wicked device, which he devised against the Jews, should return upon his own head, and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows. 26 Wherefore they called these days Purim after the name of Pur.

This goes for us too (Mat. 7:1-2).

1 Judge not, that ye be not judged. 2 For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.

If nations today would look back on the history of the Jews and see what happened to those nations that persecuted her, like Edom, and they

could see the hand of God in their fate, they would either want to help the Jews or leave them completely alone. This goes back to the promise God made to Abraham (Gen. 12:3),

3* And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

VERSE SIXTEEN

Drunk upon my holy mountain...Strong wine is sometimes referred to as meaning God's fury or wrath (Jer. 25:15-17, 27-28). (Daniel had probably read this same chapter when he wrote the prophecy of the seventy weeks, in chapter nine of Daniel.)

For as ye have drunk...Just as Edom had defiled God's holy mountain by causing the Jews to drink of the wine of their own fury against Israel, God's covenant people, so they and all other nations would drink of the wine of God's wrath (Jer. 49:12). They will so completely drink down the wrath of God that their existence will disappear from the face of the earth. Whereas Judah's calamity shall be temporary (v-17), the enemies of God's people shall never regain their former position (vv 18-19).

THE RESTORATION OF ISRAEL

VERSE SEVENTEEN

Obadiah now goes from the judgment of Edom and the nations to the raising up of Israel. Israel will be delivered and restored. There shall be a remnant which escape (Isa. 37:31-32; Joel 2:30-32).

30* And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. 31 The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD

come. 32 And it shall come to pass, *that* whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call.

There shall be Holiness...The remnant will be completely separated from all that is unclean and will wholly belong to God (Isa. 4:3; 52:1; Joel 3:17).

Isa. 3* And it shall come to pass, *that he that is* left in Zion, and *he that* remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called holy, *even* every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem: 4 When the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof by the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning.

Shall possess their possessions...The remnant will occupy all the land that God had promised Abraham at this time (Jer. 16:14-15).

14* Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that it shall no more be said, The LORD liveth, that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; 15 But, The LORD liveth, that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north, and from all the lands whither he had driven them: and I will bring them again into their land that I gave unto their fathers.

VERSE EIGHTEEN

House of Jacob...House of Joseph...Refers to all Israel, Jacob = Judah and Benjamin, Joseph = the southern kingdom, the ten tribes of Israel, the northern kingdom (Psa. 77:15).

15* Thou hast with *thine* arm redeemed thy people, the sons of Jacob and Joseph. Selah.

The two will form one kingdom again in possession of an enlarged land, including the land of Edom (Jer. 30:3 😊)

3* For, lo, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel and Judah, saith the LORD: and I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it.

Isa. 11:11-12

11* And it shall come to pass in that day, *that* the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. 12 And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.

(Notice God said, *a second time*. The first time is when He brought them out of the Babylonian captivity. I believe we are living in the midst of the *second* time now). Also, Isaiah indicates that the second dispersion of the Jews would be to all nations, *from the four corners of the earth*.

According to Josephus and the first book of the Maccabees, after their return from captivity, among whom were some from the tribes of the north, attacked Edom and reduced them to slavery and compelled them to be circumcised, obey the law, and incorporated them into the Jewish nation. They *devoured* them.

VERSES NINETEEN AND TWENTY

The Jews will then possess land east of the Jordan and west along the Mediterranean. The ten tribes of Israel will possess the territory of the Canaanites and north near Sidon. The captivity of the children of Israel and the captivity of Jerusalem I think are referring to the captivity among the nations of the world as well as Babylon and Assyria. The fulfillment of these verses will be in the Millennium.

VERSE TWENTY-ONE

Here Obadiah looks forward, first to Israel's judging Edom (in Maccabean times), and second to the kingdom's being the Lord's (millennial).

And the saviours shall come...God will raise up men to lead the Israelites against Edom just as He did in the days of the Judges. The judges were not such a burden to the people as the kings proved to be afterwards (1 Sam. 8:10-18). There have been many saviours over the centuries; such as Moses, the judges, Zerubbabel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and the Maccabees. But all these saviours are types and forerunners of the Messiah, the Savior which is Christ the Lord.

The kingdom shall be the Lords...The kingdom that is the Messiah's, where all the promises God gave to the Jewish nation will come to fulfillment.