

Lessons from Obadiah

General Remarks and Background

Obadiah is the shortest book in the Old Testament, consisting of one book of twenty-one verses. It foretells the utter destruction of Edom.

Edom is also known in the Bible as Seir, Hor, Esau, and Idumaea.

Edom was situated to the east of the Jordan River and extended southward from the borders of Moab to the Gulf of Aqaba. On the eastern side Edom was bordered by the desert. It was approximately 20 to 30 miles wide and about 100 miles long.

It was located along the great trade routes between Syria and Egypt and profited from this trade. The inhabitants of Edom grew rich on tolls extracted from the many caravans.

This country was naturally strong and secure. The central area has red sandstone cliffs which are easily fortified. As a result of having made their home within this natural fortress, the people of Edom were free to wage war and levy tribute on others and then retreat to their strong defensive position.

Edom's major towns were Teman in the south, Bozrah in the north, and Sela (the capital) in the most inaccessible part of the rocky highlands. Sela later became **Petra**.

Some of the first references to Edom are found in Genesis 32: 3; 33: 16

Theme and Primary Lesson

The theme of the book is a denunciation of Edom and a prophecy of her ultimate complete destruction. On more than one occasion Edom treated Israel very badly. She had a bad attitude toward her sister nation, and this translated into treacherous actions against her. Edom often sided with the enemies of Israel. One of the most notable times when the Edomites wronged Israel is recorded in Numbers 20: 14-21. This was a very uncharitable and unjust thing to do. After all, Israel and Edom were the descendants of twin brothers, Jacob and Esau. However, God ultimately brought Edom to total destruction while He preserved Israel.

A very comforting statement regarding these facts is found in the *New Geneva Study Bible*:

The purpose, therefore, more than to warn Edom of imminent judgment, is to reassure God's people of His triumphant justice at work for them. Edom prospered, Judah lay defeated, and the moral order of the world appeared to have been overthrown by lawless forces. But the prophet Obadiah was raised up with a message of God's sovereign justice in order to strengthen His people's weakened faith. It is the righteous purpose of God, not the evil will of men, that determines history.

When the church suffers at the hands of God's enemies, she needs to return to the prophecy of Obadiah and renew her faith in the just God revealed there. He cares for His persecuted people, and behind their present circumstances He is always at work for them.

John Gill also draws this lesson as he writes that "the subject of it is Edom, whose destruction is foretold, and is to be considered as a type of the enemies of Christ and his kingdom..."

David later subdued Edom and made them subservient to Israel. This is found in 2 Samuel 8: 3, 14. This event could very well be at least a partial fulfillment of the prophecy in Genesis 25:23, "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." Paul refers to this prophecy in Romans 9: 12.

Outline

A very simple outline of the book is drawn from *Unger's Bible Handbook*:

Edom's Destruction Foretold, 1-9
Cause of Edom's Fall, 10-14
The Day of the Lord, 15-21

Gleanings and Lessons

Pride

We find from verses three and four that judgment came upon Edom because of her pride. Edom was proud of and trusted in her strong defensive position. Due to her unique geographical situation, Edom was almost impregnable. Her capital city was Petra. This incredible place is the number one tourist attraction in the nation of Jordan even now.

The entrance to the city is through the *Siq*, a narrow gorge, about a mile in length, which is flanked on either side by soaring, high cliffs. The city, itself, is surrounded by mountains.

Experts say that because of this deep gorge through which Petra is entered, it would be possible for a dozen men to hold it against an army. Even if the *siq* were breached, it would be possible for the inhabitants to carry on a successful defense from the mountains. From a human standpoint it is hard to imagine a safer spot than Edom and its capital city of Petra.

Yet God said that He would bring the seemingly indestructible city to utter ruin. He said in verse five that Edom would be worse off than if robbers had spoiled her or if she had been picked like a grape vine. At least the robbers would have left something and the grape-gatherers would have left a few grapes to glean. But her enemies would leave her absolutely nothing!

Pride is a horrible sin. We do not realize how terrible or how subtle this sin is. Would we say that a man is a good man, but he is a thief? Of course not! But would we say that a man is a good man, but he is a proud man?

Pride seems to be the master sin, which leads to many other sins. Satan used an appeal to pride to tempt Eve in the garden and he still uses that as a tactic today. Pride is an attempt to be as God. It is the idea that we can get along without God. In His mercy God often chastises His people and allows great troubles to come into their lives to teach them humility and dependence on Him. The wicked are proud because they feel no need of God. They ridicule the righteous and say that their religion is a crutch. David speaks of them in Psalms 10:4, "The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts."

God often lets the wicked go on their way with no trouble in their lives. Because of this they become more and more lifted up with pride. We read of this in Psalms 73:6, "Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment."

Pride is bad for an individual and it is bad for a nation. Another thing for which Edom was proud was for all her alliances. But these allies eventually turned against her and betrayed her. We read of this in verse seven.

The United States also must not trust in her diplomacy and alliances. The only thing in which a nation is ever secure is a humble and obedient relationship with God.

Israel also made the same mistake as Edom and often trusted in alliances with other nations rather than reliance on God. We read of one instance of this in Isaiah 31:1, "Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many; and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the LORD!"

Trusting in Wisdom

Looking at verse 6 we see that another mistake that the Edomites made was to trust in their wisdom. The Edomites had a well-established reputation for exceptional wisdom in conducting their affairs of state. This can be seen from Jeremiah 49:7, "Concerning Edom, thus saith the LORD of hosts; Is wisdom no more in Teman? is counsel perished from the prudent? is their wisdom vanished?" Remember that Teman was one of the principal cities of Edom.

However, when the Lord judges a people He often removes their wisdom from them and they simply cannot think straight. Their decisions are often disastrous. The Lord said the same thing about Israel in Isaiah 29:13-14, "Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men: Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid."

Commenting on this passage Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 1:19-21, "For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe."

When people indulge in hatred, like the Edomites did to their Israelite brethren, what wisdom they have departs. The apostle wrote of this in 1 John 2:10-11, "He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes."

Individuals and nations must realize that according to Proverbs 9:10, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding."

True wisdom is accompanied by humility and a peaceable disposition as we learn from James 3:13-18, "Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom. But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace."

In the United States we need **personal** and **national** humility, and a reverent fear of God. Only then will we be truly wise.

Solomon wrote of the only way to make wise decisions in Proverbs 3:5-6, "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."

If My People...

(I have gleaned the following thoughts from *The Minor Prophets* by J. M. Boice)

Here is the duty of the Christian community within a nation, however large or small that community may be→ 2 Chronicles 7:14, "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."

God may bring healing to the land because of the **remnant!**

1. We must humble ourselves. Humility is the opposite of pride.

2. We must pray. We must spend time with God.
3. We must seek God's face. What would God have us personally to do? Seek His face→
Psalms 32:8, "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye."

Psalms 27:8, "When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, LORD, will I seek."

Psalms 105:4, "Seek the LORD, and his strength: seek his face evermore."

4. We must turn from our wicked ways. We must first recognize that many of **our** ways are wicked.

A Loss of Courage

Verse 9 tells us that even the "mighty men" of Edom would be "dismayed" and because of this lack of ability to courageously fight, would be slaughtered. The Hebrew word translated "dismayed" here is *chathath*. It is translated in other places in the Old Testament as "discouraged, scared, terrified, amazed, affrighted, broken, confounded." When the Lord removes His presence, even the bravest man becomes a coward. This is true not only of children of God. A study of history will show that there are times in a nation's existence when the people are vibrant, strong, courageous, and optimistic. There are other times when they seem to lose their way and even their morale and motivation. One thing that will certainly eventually lead to a lack of courage is a sense of guilt. This is plainly taught in Proverbs 28:1, "The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion."

Ultimately courage comes from the Lord. The entire army of Israel, including King Saul, cowered before the Philistines and their champion, Goliath. Young David, however, had the courage of a lion.

We now come to the second division of this prophecy which is:

The Cause of Edom's Fall, 10-14

Looking at these five verses it is plain to see that God's judgment on Edom was because of her persistent mistreatment of Israel. Commentators are not in complete agreement when the things here enumerated happened. There are several historical possibilities. To know all the details of when these things occurred is not important. We who know that the Bible is the inspired word of God know that these are descriptions of historical realities.

The sad fact is that Edom did not treat her sister nation, Israel, as she should have, and God was highly displeased because of this. Eventually Edom was totally destroyed and went out of existence as a separate nation because of God's judgment. We must remember that Edom and Israel were the descendants of twin brothers, Jacob and Esau, and that they should have treated

one another as brethren. We must also remember that Israel was God's chosen nation, the one with the inspired prophets, the Levitical priesthood, the tabernacle, the temple, and the custodians of the Old Testament word of God. This chosen nation was the one from whom the promised Messiah would come. It was highly displeasing to God for a nation to mistreat His special nation.

We should learn a very practical lesson from this. God intends for us to love our brethren, especially our brethren in the Lord. Paul wrote in Galatians 6:10, "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." Peter tells us in 1 Peter 2:17, "Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king."

We must not be callous and indifferent about the welfare and needs of our brethren. We must not have the wicked attitude of Cain. When the Lord asked Cain where his brother, Abel, was, Cain answered contemptuously, "...I know not: Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen. 4: 9).

In contrast to this Abraham went to the rescue of Lot, when Lot was taken captive. Abraham did this even though Lot had mistreated him with an attitude of greed, and was in trouble because he was in the wrong place. Even with these factors, Abraham immediately and vigorously went to Lot's aid when he heard that he was in trouble. (See Gen. 14).

The Progressive Nature of Sin

There seems to be another very valuable lesson we can learn here in our study of Obadiah. It appears that Edom's behavior toward Israel went from bad to worse. At first she merely "stood on the other side" and watched as Israel was spoiled by her enemies. (v. 11). She did not help Israel in her time of trouble, but she was not actively engaged against her. Then she began to rejoice against Israel and to speak proudly against her. (v. 12). Progressing downwardly in her behavior against her sister nation, Edom next actually entered Israel and took spoil from her. (v. 13). Finally, she captured some of the Israelites who were fleeing and turned them over to their enemies. (v. 14).

This is the way that sin works. Once begun on a course of sin we degenerate rapidly unless we are blessed to repent. This retrogression is plainly seen in James 1:13-15, "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."

A very sad and depressing account of how, when people deny the claims of God on them and begin to go away from Him, is recorded in Romans 1: 18-32. Right in the middle of this passage, we read in Romans 1:28, "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient..."

The first time that sin rears its ugly head, we must immediately deal with it.

We come now to the third division of this prophecy which is:

The Day of the Lord, 15-21

We are reminded here that God has control of all nations, not just Israel. This is plain from such Scriptures as Jeremiah 25:17, "Then took I the cup at the LORD'S hand, and made all the nations to drink, unto whom the LORD had sent me..." Daniel also made this clear in his prophecy as is recorded in Daniel 4:35, "And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?"

Solomon witnessed to this same truth in Proverbs 8:15-16, "By me kings reign, and princes decree justice. By me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth."

The destruction of the actual nation of Edom is here being prophesied, but Edom here also seems to be used as an example of all the enemies of God's people. When history comes to an end only the people of God will still be standing; all their enemies will finally be destroyed!

Many times the enemies of God's people have rejoiced over them when they have been in trouble. But at the last it is God's children who shall eternally rejoice over all their enemies. At one time Edom had been in an exalted position and Israel had been desolate. However, at His appointed time, God turned the tables as we see from Ezekiel 35:15, "As thou didst rejoice at the inheritance of the house of Israel, because it was desolate, so will I do unto thee: thou shalt be desolate, O mount Seir, and all Idumea, even all of it: and they shall know that I am the LORD."

There is an expression that we sometime use that "he laughs best who laughs last." Well, God, and His people as they are secure in Him, will, indeed, have the last laugh. The psalmist comments on this in Psalms 2:1-4, "Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision."

In these verses, which tell of the literal deliverance of the nation of Israel from her enemies, there is a deeper lesson of the spiritual deliverance of God's people from all their spiritual enemies. I agree with the following comforting quotation from John Gill as he comments on verse 17 of Obadiah's prophecy:

But upon Mount Zion shall be deliverance... Not only by Cyrus, at the end of the seventy years' captivity; and by the Maccabees from the Idumeans, and other enemies; but by the Messiah; for not merely temporal deliverance is here intended, unless as a shadow, type, and figure; but spiritual deliverance from the law, sin, Satan, the world, death, hell, and wrath to come, by Christ; who is the Deliverer that should both come to Zion and out of Zion, and who has wrought the above deliverance for Zion, his church and people; and where it is preached and proclaimed, and where those who are delivered come and dwell...

I believe that Gill is warranted in drawing such lessons as these from the Old Testament prophets because of this glorious quotation from 1 Peter 1:10-12, "Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into."

In interpreting prophecy in this way I am following what Elder Michael Gowens calls the interpretive view of IDEALISM in his book, *Glory to Come: A Framework for Understanding Future Things*. He is concerned mainly with the book of *Revelation*, but I think that what he says applies to a great extent to many of the Old Testament prophecies also. He gives a brief summary of this view in the following paragraph:

This view is also called the "kingdom historical" view. The "idealist" sees Revelation as a panorama of the cosmic conflict between good and evil over the span of human history, with good triumphing in the end. It contends that Revelation is written in symbolic language not because it is a secret code to be unlocked or an esoteric puzzle to be solved, but because it is concerned to teach general spiritual principles regarding the spiritual warfare in which the believer is involved. These principles had a specific application to the seven churches in Asia Minor. They also have a wider application to believers in every age who find themselves in the throes of spiritual conflict. The universal warfare between the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world will be consummated when the Risen Christ returns, "riding a White Horse" (Rev. 19: 11), to vanquish His foes and bring everlasting peace and safety to His people.

It is certainly true that the events recorded in *Obadiah* and the other prophetic books record actual historical events for us. It is also true that in many cases these historical realities teach far-reaching spiritual lessons. The New Testament Christian can draw much useable information and comfort from these prophecies. Paul alluded to this in Romans 15:4, "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope."

This is not only true of the prophetic books of the Old Testament. Even in reference to the Wilderness Journey of the children of Israel, it is written in 1 Corinthians 10:11, "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come."

Showing how relevant and valuable the Old Testament is to us today, it is said of the Lord Jesus in Luke 24:27, "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself."

Including every section of the Old Testament and its relevance to New Testament saints, it is written in Luke 24:44, "And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you,

while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me."

However, it is also true that if we are to understand what is written, He must do for us what He did for them: "Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures." (Luke 24:45). It would then behoove us to pray often the same prayer that David prayed in Psalms 119:18, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law."

We will make a few brief comments on these closing verses:

V. 15→ "Now the prophet sets the judgment of Edom against the larger backdrop of God's moral reckoning with all nations. This episode with Edom is only a small preview of God's judgment; He will not stop until He has cleansed His world of all His enemies."-*Geneva Study Bible*.

v. 16→ The prophet seems to be saying that as God's enemies have enjoyed a drunken orgy at the defeat of Israel, they will ultimately drink deeply of the cup of God's wrath!

vs. 17, 18→ Mt. Zion, representing God's people, will finally come into the fullness of their inheritance and into the full possession of all the Lord has purchased for them. Conversely, the Edomites, representing the enemies of God and of His people, shall be utterly destroyed.

vs. 19, 20→God's people will possess the land of their enemies.

v. 21→ The total triumph of God's kingdom will finally be completely and fully manifested!

God will be all in all, and His glorious, triumphant people will reign forever with Him. In this promise, Judah found hope for a future without Edomite persecution; here too the church finds hope for the future, when "the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ" (Rev. 11: 15)-*Geneva Study Bible*.