

THE END IS NEAR FOR EDOM:

An Isagogical Overview of the Background, Theme, and Content of the Old Testament Book of

OBADIAH

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*[To the Pastors of the Ohio Conference of the Michigan District, April 23-24, 2012,
Florence, Kentucky]*

Like father, like son. He's a chip off of the block. The apple doesn't fall too far from the tree. It is not uncommon to hear someone use one of these sayings as an explanation for someone else's behavior. These commonly-used sayings are based on the generally observable truth that people tend to have similar characteristics as their parents. And with similar characteristics often comes similar behavior - not in every case, but in a general way. As one examines the history of the Old Testament, this general truth becomes quite evident. Generally speaking, sons *do* tend to be like their fathers. Descendants *do* tend to be like their ancestors - not in every case, but in a general way. Some escape this vicious circle, but many do not.

Because of this innate tendency of descendants to continue in the ways (and often *sinful* ways) of their ancestors, the inspired writings of the Old Testament prophets often denounce particular nations for particular sins that tend to be characteristic of them. The Old Testament's shortest book, Obadiah, is one place where this characteristic of the prophets shows itself. Obadiah's twenty-one verses pronounce God's judgment on a specific nation - Edom - for specific and characteristic sins of which they were guilty. And even though Obadiah wrote at a certain time in history to a certain generation of Edomites, his words have application for every generation of Edomites, insofar as they shared in the sins that tended to be characteristic of them. But furthermore, as inspired words of Scripture, Obadiah's words have an even broader application yet; for they apply to all people of all time who show themselves to be enemies of God and his beloved people.

The purpose of this paper is to give an isagogical overview of the background, theme, and content of this often overlooked book of prophecy - the fourth of "the Twelve" - the book of Obadiah.

The twenty-one verses of Obadiah might cause the average reader to be surprised at its harsh contents. However, God's message through Obadiah is essentially no different from the message he communicates through the other Old Testament prophets; for throughout the Old Testament, God promises to punish those who set themselves against him and against his chosen people Israel. The writings of the major literary prophets contain extensive sections where nation after nation is condemned for their godless and evil deeds.¹ Obadiah, however, centers on one nation and one nation alone: Edom.

But why Edom? Why does Edom have the distinction of being the nation against which an entire Old Testament book of prophecy is aimed? While it is true that only God knows for sure, a careful analysis of the biblical record reveals some compelling reasons why they earned this distinction

¹ For example, cf. Isaiah 13-23, Jeremiah 45-51, and Ezekiel 25-32.

In order to fully understand the message of Obadiah, it is important to understand the history between the nation of Edom and the nation of Israel. The history of these two nations has its beginning in the womb of one woman - Rebekah, the wife of Abraham's son Isaac. Moses tells us in Genesis: Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife [Rebekah], because she was barren. The LORD answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant. The babies jostled each other within her, and she said, "What is happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the LORD. The LORD said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger." " When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. The first to come out was red, and his whole body was like a hairy garment; so they named him Esau. After this, his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob.² As the LORD had told Rebekah, Esau and Jacob did indeed become two nations; Esau became the father of the Edomites³ and Jacob became the father of the Israelites.⁴ From the very beginning, relations between Esau and Jacob were tenuous. In fact, Moses tells us in the passage above that even while Esau and Jacob were still within the womb of Rebekah, they "jostled each other." The *Brown-Driver-Briggs* lexicon indicates that the word 'Y7 - which the NIV translates as "jostled each other"- literally means "crushed each other."⁵ It can be clearly seen from the rest of inspired Scripture that - generally speaking - this "jostling" relationship continued on throughout the lives of Esau and Jacob themselves, as well as throughout the lives of their respective descendants.

We know from Scripture that although Esau and Jacob were twins, they turned out to be quite different from each other in terms of personality and interests. Esau was a "skillful hunter, a man of the open country" while Jacob was "a quiet man, staying among the tents."⁶ Scripture is silent on whether or not these differences caused hostility and discord between the two of them during their early childhood. However, we do know for certain that serious hostility and discord became a part of their relationship at the point in their young adulthood when Jacob swindled Esau out of his birthright as well as his blessing as the firstborn son.

In fact, things got so bad between the two of them that Jacob had to flee for his life to Paddam Aram.⁷ By the time that Jacob returned to the land of Canaan some twenty years later, Esau's fury had subsided and they reconciled.⁸ However, despite their reconciliation, Esau and Jacob moved apart from one another. Esau and his descendants moved southeast to the hill country of Seir, while Jacob and his descendants remained in the land of Canaan.⁹

As far as we know, over the next 400 years the two nations had little contact due to Israel's sojourn in Egypt. However, as the Israelites were making their way to the promised land after wandering for forty years in the desert, the paths of the Israelites and the Edomites crossed once again. The Israelites sent a message to Edom, saying, "this is what *your brother Israel* says ... please let us pass

² Genesis 25:21-23

³ Genesis 36:9

⁴ Genesis 46:8

⁵ *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (electronic edition.) (954). This insight into the word Y7 also perhaps gives us further insight into why Rebekah was asking herself question, "what is happening to me?"

⁶ Genesis 25:27

⁷ Genesis 25:29ff & 27:1:ff

⁸ Genesis 33:9

⁹ Genesis 36:8, 37:1

through your country. We will not go through any field or vineyard, or drink water from any well."¹⁰ From the way the Israelites' request is phrased, it is obvious that they were fully aware of the ancient brotherly ties that existed between them and the Edomites. However, the Edomites' answer to their brother Israelites was anything but brotherly; they said "You may not pass through here; if you try, we will march out and attack you with the sword."¹¹ Even after the Israelites repeated their plea for passage, the Edomites still answered in the same way. In fact, this time they also went out to meet the Israelites with a large and powerful army to make sure they got the point.¹² By this unbrotherly action against their brother nation, the Edomites renewed and re-sowed seeds of discord and hostility that remained for generations.

The latter historical books of the Old Testament (Samuel through Chronicles) speak of a number of subsequent scuffles that occurred between the nations of Israel and Edom. We are told that King David upon becoming king of Israel¹³ subjugated the Edomites as part of his conquering activities firm control over Edom continued through the reign of king Solomon, but began to slowly dwindle during the years of the divided kingdom.¹⁴ In 2 Chronicles chapter 20, we are told that the Edomites joined an alliance of Moabites and Ammonites and rebelled against Judah during the reign of king Jehoshaphat, but their rebellion did not succeed. However, a few years later the Edomites did succeed in their rebellion against Jehoshaphat's son, king Jehoram.¹⁵ It was during this time that the chronicler says an alliance of Philistines and Arabs "attacked Judah, invaded it, and carried off all the goods found in the king's palace, together with his sons and wives."¹⁶

During the reigns of Amaziah and Uzziah, Judah did regain control of parts of Edom, capturing both their capital city of Selah (Petra) as well as the important port city of Elath.¹⁷ Yet Edom once again regained their independence by allying themselves with the dominating world powers of Assyria and, subsequently, Babylon. After Babylon conquered Jerusalem in 586 BC and carried the people of Judah into captivity, a contingent of Edomites took control of the city of Hebron and the surrounding area. This contingent of Edomites became the ancestors of the inter-testamental nation of Idumaea. Meanwhile, an Arab tribe known¹⁸ as the Nabateans took control of the historic land of Edom, including Selah (Petra), its capital."

Literary prophets from every era of Israel's history - pre-monarchy, monarchy, divided kingdom, and postexile - all foretell terror and destruction for the nation of Edom. The first prophet to do so is Moses in Exodus chapter 15. In the song that he and his sister Miriam sing after God delivered the Israelites from Pharaoh's army at the Red Sea, he includes Edom in the list of Canaanite nations who will be "terrified" by the Israelites as they make their way to the Promised Land.¹⁹ Roughly forty

¹⁰ Numbers 20:14-17

¹¹ Numbers 20:18

¹² Numbers 20:20

¹³ II Samuel 8:13

¹⁴ *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible: Volume 2.* pg. 203

¹⁵ 2 Chronicles 21:8,10

¹⁶ 2 Chronicles 21:17

¹⁷ 2 Kings 14:7,22

¹⁸ *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible: Volume 2.* pg. 204

¹⁹ Exodus 15:13 - "In your unfailing love you will lead the people you have redeemed. In your strength you will guide them to your holy dwelling. The nations will hear and tremble; anguish will grip the people of Philistia. The chiefs of Edom will be terrified, the leaders of Moab will be seized with trembling, the people of Canaan will melt away."

years later years later - shortly after Edom refused to allow Israel to pass through their territory - God spoke through the mouth of the otherwise false prophet Balaam and foretold Edom's destruction in the following words:

I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near.
A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel.
He will crush the foreheads of Moab, the skulls of all the sons of Sheth.
Edom will be conquered; Seir, his enemy will be conquered, but Israel will grow strong.
A ruler will come out of Jacob and destroy the survivors of the city."²⁰

This is the first time in the inspired record that the nation of Edom is used as a prophetic *type* for the enemies of God, his Messiah, and his people. The fact that this prophecy occurs shortly after Edom's refusal to allow Israel to pass through their land is striking. This refusal was the first of Edom's many unbrotherly acts towards their brother Israel throughout their history. Unfortunately, the later generations of Edomites would show themselves to be no less unbrotherly towards the Israelites than their ancestors. Generally speaking, the saying "*like father, like son*" showed itself to be true throughout their history. And as each generation of Edomites showed themselves to be just as unbrotherly towards their brother Israelites as their ancestors, the LORD caused the literary prophets of each generation to continue to condemn them for their actions, even to the extent of using them as Balaam did; as a prophetic *type* of the enemies of God, his Messiah, and his people.

King David writes in such a way in Psalm 52; not regarding the nation of Edom as a whole, but regarding one particular Edomite named Doeg, who was King Saul's head shepherd. Doeg had falsely accused David and Ahimelech the priest of treason and treachery against Saul. Doeg's false accusation led to the death of 85 priests at Nob, as well as to an increase in Saul's suspicion and hatred for David.²¹ What is interesting about Psalm 52 is that David condemns Doeg for his characteristic boastfulness and arrogance. As will be seen later, this is the same chief sin that Obadiah condemns the entire nation of Edomites for in his book of prophecy.

The boastful and arrogant spirit of the Edomites showed itself quite often in their desire to conquer and/or see the downfall of Israel. In Psalm 83, Asaph condemns the Edomites for how they (together with other nations) plotted against Israel, saying, "Come, let us destroy them as a nation, that the name of Israel may be remembered no more."²² The prophets Joel and Amos both denounce the Edomites for their acts of violence toward their brother Israelites. Joel declares that "Edom will be a desert waste because of violence done to the people of Judah, in whose land they shed innocent blood."²³ Amos condemns Edom "because he pursued his brother with a sword, stifling all compassion, because his anger raged continually and his fury flamed unchecked."²⁴ The prophet Isaiah declared that, because of Edom's actions, "God will stretch out over Edom the measuring line of chaos and the plumb line of destruction ... thorns will overrun her citadels, nettles and brambles her strongholds."²⁵ Ezekiel and

²⁰ Numbers 24:17-19

²¹ cf. I Samuel 21-22

²² Psalm 83:4

²³ Joel 3:19

²⁴ Amos 1:11

²⁵ Isaiah 34:11,13 (For all that Isaiah says regarding Edom, read 34:5- 17) .

Jeremiah express the same sentiments as Isaiah, but in many more words.²⁶ Psalm 137 - a psalm that was obviously written during or after the Babylonian captivity - contains a prayer that the LORD would remember how the Edomites rejoiced at seeing Jerusalem fall to the Babylonians in 586 BC.²⁷

Throughout all the writings of the prophets, a general truth is seen: when it comes to how Edom treated their brother nation of Israel throughout their history, the saying *like father, like son* rings true. Generally speaking, just as the Edomites of Moses time acted in an unbrotherly manner towards their brother Israelites, so did the Edomites of David's time ... and Joel's time ... and Isaiah's time ... and Ezekiel's time ... and, of course...

...Obadiah's time as well. A quick reading of the twenty-one verses of Obadiah's book of prophecy shows that the Edomites of his time were no less unbrotherly towards their brother Israelites than their ancestors or their descendants. But the question that biblical scholars have debated *ad nauseam* is ... what exactly was Obadiah's time? The reason for this debate is because the book of Obadiah is one of only two prophetic books in the Old Testament in which absolutely no biographical or chronological information is given at the beginning of the book. The writer simply begins with the words, "*The vision of Obadiah. This is what the Sovereign LORD says about Edom...*"²⁸ That's it. For this reason, Obadiah is among the most difficult books in the Old Testament to assign a date to.

However, it is evident from the content of the book that Obadiah was written after a time when foreigners invaded Jerusalem. Because of the lack of chronological information, some scholars²⁹ (including Luther) conclude that Obadiah **was** written after the most obvious and destructive invasion of Jerusalem - that of the Babylonians in 586 BC. The main argument for this theory is that this invasion, being the most devastating in Jerusalem's history, was the most worthy occasion for Obadiah's message. An often-mentioned corollary argument in this theory is the striking similarity between Obadiah verses 1-6 and Jeremiah 49:9-16. Some commentators argue that since these sections are so similar, Obadiah and Jeremiah must have been contemporaries.³⁰

There are, however, some significant gaps in this theory for the occasion and date of Obadiah. The most compelling one has to do with where the Jews placed Obadiah in the scroll of the twelve minor prophets. If Obadiah was indeed written after the fall of Jerusalem, then why did the Jews group it with Joel, Amos, and Jonah - all Pre-Assyrian and Assyrian era prophets - as they arranged the order of the Twelve? Grouping a prophet with other prophets from a different era was not their standard practice.³¹ Also, if Obadiah did in fact see the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple, why didn't he go into greater detail about those big events, as his would-be contemporaries did?³²

²⁶ cf. Ezekiel 25:12- 14, 35:1- 15 and Jeremiah 49:7- 22

²⁷ Psalm 137:7-"Remember, O LORD, what the Edomites did on the day Jerusalem fell. "Tear it down," they cried, "tear it down to its foundations!"

²⁸ Obadiah 1

²⁹ cf. Baker pg.23 , Luther 's *Lectures on Obadiah* (Contained in vol. 18 of *Luther's Works*), and the introduction to Obadiah in the *Concordia Study Bible*.

³⁰ cf. Baker, pg. 24

³¹ Scholars generally agree that there is a general chronological order in the way the twelve minor prophets are arranged, although they also agree that it is not strict. C.F. Keil makes a convincing argument that, when arranging the order of the Twelve, the Jews grouped the books into three main time periods - Pre-Assyrian & Assyrian, Babylonian, and Post-Exilic - and then ordered them thematically within those groups. See Keil, pp. 2-4.

³² cf. Laetsch, pg. 201

C.F. Keil mentions another intriguing argument for an early date of composition; he points out that Joel 2:32 could very likely be a direct quote of Obadiah verse 17.³³ If Keil's proposition is correct, then that would mean that Obadiah would also have to have been written early, since Joel is generally thought to have been one of the earliest of the literary prophets.

Was there, however, an earlier foreign invasion of Jerusalem which could have served as the occasion for Obadiah's book of prophecy? A careful analysis of the biblical record reveals that there indeed was a foreign invasion of Jerusalem that would allow for an Assyrian-period date for the book of Obadiah. As was mentioned earlier, 2 Chronicles chapter 21 says that during the reign of king Jehoram (ca. 845 BC)³⁴ an alliance of Philistines and Arabs "attacked Judah, invaded it, and carried off all the goods found in the king's palace, together with his sons and wives."³⁵ This invasion took place shortly after the Edomites rebelled against Judah and set up their own king.³⁶ A number of scholars³⁷ feel that this invasion is a more likely setting for the book of Obadiah. Since this invasion was successful enough to loot the king's palace in Jerusalem, it certainly was a big enough event to warrant a prophetic message. At the same time, it was not so devastating an invasion that Obadiah would lament about it on the scale that Jeremiah did upon seeing the Babylonians utterly destroy Jerusalem and the temple in 586 BC. But, perhaps most importantly, this setting also accounts for why the Jews grouped Obadiah's book of prophecy among the other pre-Assyrian and Assyrian era prophets.

Closely related to the question of *when* exactly Obadiah wrote his book is the question of *who* exactly Obadiah is. Here too, because of the book's lack of biographical and chronological information, scholars have debated as well about the identity of the writer of Obadiah. Some scholars suggest the possibility that "Obadiah" might be a title or pen-name,³⁸ but even the scholars who suggest this possibility generally conclude that Obadiah was probably the author's given name, simply because it is evident from Scripture that Obadiah was a fairly common name among the Israelites. In its introduction to Obadiah, the *Concordia Self-Study Bible* lists twelve occurrences of the name "Obadiah" in the Old Testament, and all of them seem to have been different men. Perhaps the most well-known of these Obadias is the Obadiah who had the official position of being in charge of King Ahab's palace. We're told that he was a "devout believer in the LORD" who showed his devotion by hiding one hundred of the LORD's prophets in two separate caves, thereby protecting them from the bloodlust of wicked queen Jezebel.³⁹ In Luther's *Lectures on Obadiah*,⁴⁰ he says that St. Jerome was of the opinion that God granted this particular Obadiah the gift of prophecy as a result of this act of devotion, and that therefore he must be the Obadiah who wrote the book of prophecy by the same name. But then - in Luther's classic heavy-handed style - he dismisses Jerome's conclusion, saying that it is "much like the dreams of old women ... for in their own commentaries, the Jews draw a different conclusion." Strangely, though, Luther doesn't go on to say what the Jews' conclusion

³³ Joel 2:32: "for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, *as the LORD has said.*" cf. Keil, pg. 343.

³⁴ *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible : Volume 3.* pg. 421

³⁵ 2 Chronicles 21:17

³⁶ 2 Chronicles 21:8-10

³⁷ Among the commentators favoring this occasion for the writing of Obadiah are Archer, Laetsch, Keil, and Spaude.

³⁸ A suggestion which is also made regarding Malachi as well - who happens to be only other prophet for whom we have no chronological or biographical information. The name *Malachi* ("My Messenger"), like *Obadiah* ("Servant of the LORD") would be an appropriate pen-name.

³⁹ cf. 1 Kings 18:3-4

⁴⁰ Contained in *Luther's Works*, vol.18.

was.

If a case is to be made for a different Obadiah mentioned in Scripture to be the author of the book of prophecy by the same name, the only other logical conclusion - again, because of the lack of information - is the Obadiah spoken of in 2 Chronicles chapter 17. This Obadiah was an official of king Jehoshaphat of Judah. At king Jehoshaphat's command, this Obadiah together with fifteen other officials "taught throughout Judah,⁴¹ king with them the Book of the Law of the LORD." This Obadiah undoubtedly lived through Edom's rebellion against Judah (which occurred during Jehoshaphat's time) and very easily could have lived to see the Philistine/Arab invasion of Jerusalem that occurred during the reign of Jehoshaphat's son, Jehoram. As mentioned before, these events would have furnished him plenty of an "occasion" to write what God ultimately inspired him to write in the book of Obadiah.

Our own Professor Cyril Spaude is of the opinion that this particular Obadiah was the author of the book of prophecy that bears the same name.⁴² After explaining the difficulty of dating the book and the two most prominent options, he suggests the early date of composition to be more likely. But even as he opts for the early date of composition, he also suggests that perhaps the book was meant to have a "double fulfillment or reference."⁴³ In other words, he is saying that perhaps what Obadiah was *immediately* referring to as he wrote his book was how the Edomites acted during the Philistine/Arab invasion of Jerusalem that occurred during the reign of king Jehoram. However, perhaps at the same time God was using him to prophetically foretell how the Edomites would rejoice in a similar manner when Jerusalem would be invaded and pillaged by a group of foreigners once again in the future; that is, when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC. Thus, Psalm 137:7 is inspired evidence that Obadiah's prophecy was fulfilled. Of all the options suggested by commentators, this one seems to be the most plausible. It combines the strengths of each option while excluding the gaps, and at the same time displays a high view of predictive prophecy.

In the end, though, we cannot know for sure who Obadiah was and when he wrote. But, ultimately these things are immaterial; because no matter who wrote this book of prophecy or when it was written, what is most important is to consider the message which this inspired book of the Old Testament proclaims. Not surprisingly, the message of Obadiah is consistent with the rest of the prophets, the rest of the Old Testament, as well as the rest of Scripture. Obadiah proclaims a stern message of law to the nation of Edom because they had consistently mistreated their brother nation of Israel throughout their history. But Obadiah also proclaims a comforting message of deliverance to God's faithful people who had suffered through all the mistreatment and scorn. He ties these two themes together by proclaiming that "the day of the LORD is near"⁴⁴ and it will mean judgment for lawbreakers and deliverance for God's people.⁴⁵

The twenty-one verses of Obadiah follow a very basic thought progression, and therefore almost all

⁴¹ 2 Chronicles 17:7

⁴² cf. Spaude, pg. 2.

⁴³ cf. Spaude, pg. 3.

⁴⁴ Obadiah 15

⁴⁵ An interesting side note regarding the theme and message of Obadiah is that he structures much of his message around the well-known Old Testament phrase "the Day of the LORD." What is significant about his use of this phrase is that, if he did in fact prophesy around the time of King Jehoram (ca. 845 B.C.), then he was among the first (if not the first) of the Old Testament prophets to use it.

commentators break the book down into a three-fold outline similar to the one below:

v.1-9	God's judgment on Edom.
v.10-14	The cause of Edom's downfall.
v.15-21	The coming Day of the Lord.

Using this general outline, what follows is a brief isagogical summary of the content of Obadiah's book of prophecy.

Obadiah 1-9 God's Judgment on Edom

1 The vision of Obadiah.

This is what the Sovereign LORD says about Edom—

*We have heard a message from the LORD: An envoy was sent to the nations to say,
"Rise, and let us go against her for battle"*

2 "See, I will make you small among the nations; you will be utterly despised.

*3 The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rocks
and make your home on the heights, you who say to yourself,*

*'Who can bring me down to the ground?' 4 Though you soar like the eagle
and make your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down, "
declares the LORD.*

Obadiah's book of prophecy is called a "vision" (Hebrew יִּזְוִיָּה). This particular word is one of the most common words used to refer to prophetic revelation in the Old Testament.⁴⁶ Two other prophets- Isaiah and Nahum - both use this word as the title of their book of prophecy as well.⁴⁷ As Obadiah begins his book, he gets right to the point: the point: *"This is what the Sovereign LORD says about Edom."* These words jettison the reader of Obadiah to the eternal courtroom of the living God, the Sovereign LORD, for he has something to say regarding Edom.

But before the LORD begins speaking directly, Obadiah seems to insert an editorial comment of sorts in the second half of verse 1. The reader may wonder about the identity of the group of speakers that says *"we have heard a message from the LORD."* Does Obadiah mean *we... as* in *we* who are a larger group of prophets? This could be his intended meaning, since a number of prophets from every era of Israel's history had foretold Edom's doom. Or, does he mean *we ... as* in *we* who are *all* part of the human race? This could be true as well, since the envoy was sent *"to the nations."* Regardless, no matter how one understands the *"we"* of verse one, Obadiah's message is clear: The Sovereign LORD has sent an envoy to the nations in order to raise up an international fighting force to go against Edom in battle. The reader familiar with the rest of Scripture can't help but think of *Psalms 83:4* and note the irony; for the Edomites, who themselves had sent envoys to the nations saying, "Come let us destroy [the Israelites] as a nation," are now on the opposite end of that proposition. Now, they themselves are the ones against whom an international fighting force is being

⁴⁶ A sampling of the occurrences of this word: 1 Samuel 3:1, 2 Chronicles 32:32, Ezekiel 12:22,27, Daniel 1:17, Micah 3:6.

⁴⁷ cf. Isaiah 1:1, Nahum 1:1

raised. But in their case, it's not just a few neighboring countries that are raising a fighting force; no, it's the Sovereign LORD himself.

In verses two through four, Obadiah records the judgment that the LORD has pronounced on Edom in his eternal courtroom, as well as why he has pronounced it. And what is that judgment? "*See, I will make you small among the nations; you will be utterly despised.*" And why? Because, as the LORD says, "*The pride of your heart has deceived you.*"

The reader who is familiar with the Edomites and their earthly circumstances can certainly understand why they had fallen prey to the sin of pride. Quite frankly, it was because they had many things to be proud of! In the following verses, the LORD condemns the Edomites for their prideful trust in many earthly things. But as he begins his condemnation of Edom, he mentions the chief source of their pride; their impregnable fortress-cities which were located their historic homeland, the hill country of Seir. Chief among those cities was Selah, their capital. This particular fortress-city - which is very likely what Obadiah is referring to when he says "you who live in *the clefts of rocks*"⁴⁸ is located within an open basin, approximately a mile in length and three-fourths of a mile in width. The only way to enter the city is to walk through a narrow, winding canyon that is about a mile in length. Throughout the route, the steep canyon walls do not drop below two hundred feet in height, and at some points they are only twelve feet apart from each other.⁴⁹ These factors made Selah a virtually impregnable fortress-city, and the Edomites took great pride in it - as well as their other cities that were like it. And because of these fortress-cities, the Edomites pridefully thought of themselves as soaring eagles, aloof from danger and safe from destruction. But in their sinful pride they had forgotten that there is an eagle who soars higher than them; the Sovereign LORD. And the LORD used his prophet Obadiah to declare to Edom that "*though you soar like the eagle and make your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down.*"

*5 If thieves came to you, if robbers in the night –
Oh, what a disaster awaits you – would they not steal only as much as they wanted?
If grape pickers came to you, would they not leave a few grapes?
6 But how Esau will be ransacked, his hidden treasures pillaged!
7 All your allies will force you to the border; your friends will deceive and overpower you;
those who eat your bread will set a trap for you, but you will not detect it.
8 "In that day," declares the LORD, "will I not destroy the wise men of Edom,
men of understanding in the mountains of Esau?
9 Your warriors, O Teman, will be terrified,
and everyone in Esau's mountains will be cut down in the slaughter.*

In the ancient world, the Edomites were quite well-known for their wealth. Edom's strategic location along the King's Highway - the main road between Egypt and Mesopotamia - provided them with a constant influx of wealth from the trading industry. Their economy was further stimulated by the

⁴⁸ Literally, "You who live in *Selah*". According to the BDB Hebrew Lexicon, The Hebrew word יִלָּה means "cliff, rock, or cra_g." " However, *Selah* was also the proper name for the capital city of Edom, which has become better known by its Greek name, *Petra*. Thus Obadiah could very likely be referring to the Edomite city of *Selah* by name here, not just to the Edomites' general tendency to live amongst the clefts of rocks in their homeland.

⁴⁹ *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible: Volume 4: pg. 740.*

mining of copper and iron, both of which could be found in mass quantities throughout Edom. The abundant wealth that the Edomites enjoyed caused them to be quite prideful of their riches. However, through Obadiah the LORD declared that all of this was about to end, because the LORD was going to see to it that *"Esau will be ransacked, his hidden treasures pillaged!"* In verse 5, the LORD uses two illustrations to convey to the Edomites that this ransacking and pillaging was going to be worse than normal. The first illustration has to do with thieves, the second with grape-harvesters. Because ancient thieves were in such a hurry to escape, they often only stole what they could grab in a short amount of time. Similarly, because ancient grape pickers were in such a hurry to finish their task, they often left some of the grapes unharvested on the vine. In both illustrations, something remained afterwards. The point of these illustrations is that it was going to be much different for Edom; for their destruction would be thorough and complete. If they were about to suffer at the hands of normal thieves and looters, they might survive. But that would not be the case, because it was the LORD himself who was about to bring this looting upon them. Their destruction would be thorough and complete: *"Esau will be ransacked, his hidden treasures pillaged. "*

Wealth was not the only thing that Edom enjoyed because of its rich natural resources and its strategic location on a main trade route. No, they also enjoyed the security afforded by alliances with foreign countries. These alliances were forged because foreign countries were eager to protect their economic interests, which were largely dependent on the trade routes that went through Edom. However, the LORD announced through Obadiah that these would soon be stripped away as well. *"All your allies -will force you to the border; your friends will deceive and overpower you; those who eat your bread will set a trap for you, but you will not detect it."*

Besides impregnable fortress-cities, wealth, and foreign alliances, the last source of Edom's sinful pride was their world-renowned wisdom. The Edomite city of Teman, which was located near Selah (Petra), was particularly well-known for its wise men. In fact, Eliphaz, one of Job's three friends, was a Temanite.⁵⁰

However, the LORD was about to render this famous trait of the Edomites useless as well. *"In that day, "declares the LORD, "will not destroy the wise men of Edom, men of understanding in the mountains of Esau?"*

Because LORD would soon strip the Edomites of their protective fortress-cities, their wealth, their alliances, and their wisdom, a terrifying fate awaited them: *"Your warriors, O Teman, will be terrified, and everyone in Esau's mountains will be cut down in the slaughter."*

But why had the LORD decreed such a thorough destruction for Edom? What had they done? The LORD inspired Obadiah to record more specific reasons for their destruction. Verses 10-14 record these reasons in detail. The phrase *"in that day"* (v.8) serves as a literary bridge which connects this section and the next. The LORD clearly shows through Obadiah that the terrifying day which was coming for the Edomites was a direct result of what they had done on a particular day in the past.

Obadiah 10 -14 The Cause of Edom's Downfall

⁵⁰ cf. Job 2:11. It is also interesting to note that of job's three friends, Eliphaz was the first to speak to him in his misery (cf. Job 4:1). Perhaps he was expected (as the wisest of the three) to speak first; or perhaps he presumptuously thought himself to be the wisest and therefore spoke first. In any case, the fact that he spoke to Job first is interesting!

- 10 *Because of the violence against your brother Jacob,
you will be covered with shame; you will be destroyed forever.*
- 11 *On the day you stood aloof while strangers carried off his wealth
and foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem, you were like one of them.*
- 12 *You should not look down on your brother in the day of his misfortune,
nor rejoice over the people of Judah in the day of their destruction,
nor boast so much in the day of their trouble.*
- 13 *You should not march through the gates of my people in the day of their disaster,
nor look down on them in their calamity in the day of their disaster,
nor seize their wealth in the day of their disaster.*
- 14 *You should not wait at the crossroads to cut down their fugitives,
nor hand over their survivors in the day of their trouble.*

At the beginning of this section, Obadiah states the specific reason for Edom's horrifying destruction simply and clearly; it is *"because of the violence [done] against your brother Jacob."* " All people understand by nature that violence done to another human being is innately evil. It is not surprising, then, that violence done to one's own family members is widely considered to be all the more heinous and atrocious in nature. And, since Israel was Edom's brother nation, this is the kind of violence that the Edomites were guilty of. Therefore the LORD once again pronounced sentence on Edom, saying *"Because of the violence against your brother Jacob you will be covered with shame; you will be destroyed forever."*

The LORD then goes on in verses 11-14 to give specific examples of the cruelty and violence that the Edomites displayed towards their brother Israelites. They *"stood aloof"* and watched Jerusalem be pillaged by foreign invaders (v.10), and as they did so, they pridefully *"looked down"* on their brother Israelites and even *"rejoiced over"* what was happening to them, all the while *"boasting"* that this destruction hadn't come upon them (v.11). But these weren't even the worst of their sins; for they not only enjoyed watching Jerusalem be invaded and plundered, but they also used Israel's time of weakness as an opportunity to mistreat them. While foreign invaders were busy plundering Jerusalem, the Edomites entered the gates of Jerusalem and took some of the plunder for themselves (v.13). Besides this, they also laid in wait for Israelite fugitives who were trying to escape and either cut them down themselves or handed them over as prisoners to their enemies (v.14).

For the Edomites, the day that all this happened was a day of sinful boasting, rejoicing, pillaging, and killing. But for the people of Jerusalem, it was a day of misfortune, destruction, trouble, and disaster. Eight times in this four-verse section, the LORD reminds the Edomites what they should not have done on that day... *"in the day of Israel's disaster."* And with each recurring refrain, the LORD's righteous anger seems to build. Because of what the Edomites had done *in the day of Israel's destruction*, a day was coming - *the day of the LORD* - when they would pay for their evil deeds. A day was coming - *the day of the LORD* - when the Sovereign LORD would mete out his perfect justice.

Obadiah 15-21 The Coming Day of the Lord

15 *"The day of the LORD is near for all nations.*

As you have done, it will be done to you; your deeds will return upon your own head.

*16 Just as you drank on my holy hill,
so all the nations will drink continually;
they will drink and drink
and be as if they had never been.*

Having recounted Edom's shameful sins against their brother Israel, the LORD reminds Edom of a chilling fact: "*The day of the LORD is near.*" And this is what his day - *the day of the LORD* - would mean for them: "*As you have done, it will be done to you; your deeds will return upon your own head.*" Just as they had stood aloof at the mistreatment of their brother Israel, so others would stand aloof upon their punishment. Just as they had pillaged, so would they be pillaged. Just as they had cut down others, so would they be cut down. Just as they had drank in celebration at the fall of Jerusalem, so they would "*drink and drink and be as if they had never been.*"

God brought this destruction upon the Edomites in two different stages. When the Arabian tribe of the Nabateans invaded Edom and captured Selah (Petra) around 435 BC, they drove the Edomites who were still living there into the Egyptian Negev. Later on, the Idumeans (descendants of the Edomites who had taken possession of Hebron during the years of the Babylonian captivity of Judah) were extinguished in 70 AD when the Roman general Titus conquered the Jews and the Idumeans of Palestine in bloody fashion.⁵¹ The nation of people who once said to themselves "*Who can bring me down to the ground?*" were reduced to nothing, just as the LORD had said through his prophet Obadiah.

*17 But on Mount Zion will be deliverance; it will be holy,
and the house of Jacob
will possess its inheritance.
18 The house of Jacob will be a fire
and the house of Joseph a flame;
the house of Esau will be stubble,
and they will set it on fire and consume it.
There will be no survivors from the house of Esau. "
The LORD has spoken.*

Although the day of the LORD meant destruction for Edom, nevertheless it also meant deliverance for God's people. But the deliverance that Obadiah is talking about is not a literal deliverance of the literal Israelite nation, as the modern-day Zionist movement would lead us to believe. No, the deliverance that Obadiah is talking about is spiritual in nature. In his *Lectures on Obadiah*, Luther says: "*“We can understand [this kingdom] in no other way than as the spiritual kingdom of Christ spread among all the nations through the gospel ... it is very important to know that the prophet here is speaking about Christ's spiritual kingdom. The very words force us to accept this.”*⁵²

Verses 17 and 18 essentially proclaim the same prophecy that the LORD made through the otherwise

⁵¹ Spaude, pg. 24-25

⁵² Spaude, pg. 24-25

false prophet Balaam in Numbers 24.⁵³ Assuming that Obadiah was one of the earliest of the literary prophets, Isaiah was the next prophet whom the LORD used to proclaim the same thing in his day.⁵⁴ This unified message of the prophets is clear and simple: the house of Jacob (that is, the spiritual kingdom of the Messiah) will bum up the house of Esau (that is, the enemies of the Messiah's kingdom). God and his people would triumph; Satan and his minions will be consumed and destroyed. *"The house of Jacob" the LORD says, "will be a fire and the house of Joseph a flame; the house of Esau will be stubble, and they will set it on fire and consume it. There will be no survivors from the house of Esau. " The LORD has spoken. "'"*

And through the expansion of the spiritual kingdom of the Messiah, a restoration would take place; a restoration that would be all-encompassing and eternal!

*19 People from the Negev will occupy
the mountains of Esau,
and people from the foothills will possess the land of the Philistines.
They will occupy the fields of Ephraim and Samaria, and Benjamin will possess Gilead.
20 This company of Israelite exiles who are in Canaan
will possess the land as far as Zarephath;
the exiles from Jerusalem who are in Sepharad will possess the towns of the Negev.*

The fulfillment of this restoration is the New Testament Church, which has gone out to the four corners of the world. In order to illustrate this concept, Obadiah uses the "world" that his readers were quite familiar with - the land of Israel and its surrounding regions. The spiritual kingdom of the Messiah would cover the whole land; from the Negev (near Egypt) to the Zaraphath (near Tyre and Sidon).

*21 Deliverers will go up on Mount Zion to govern the mountains of Esau.
And the kingdom will be the LORD's.*

The book of Obadiah ends on an interesting evangelical and eschatological note. The word *deliverers* (Hebrew *nw'win*) is the same word used at times to refer to the Judges who delivered God's people from their enemies.⁵⁵ In the coming time of the restoration (the New Testament Church), God would send spiritual deliverers to those who are the spiritual descendants of the Edomites; those who are the enemies of God's people. This sense of the passage becomes even more clear when the NIV footnote is inserted: *Deliverers will go up from Mount Zion to govern the mountains of Esau.* In his great love and mercy, God does not take his Word away from our world, but promises to send his gospel *nw'win* - his gospel deliverers - to proclaim his Word until the very end of the age, at which point the restoration will be complete; *the kingdom will be the LORD's.*

⁵³ Numbers 24:17-19: "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel. He will crush the foreheads of Moab, the skulls of all the sons of Sheth. Edom will be conquered; Seir, his enemy will be conquered, but Israel will grow strong. A ruler will come out of Jacob and destroy the survivors of the city."

⁵⁴ Isaiah 11:10,12,14: "In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious ... he will raise a banner for the nations and gather the exiles of Israel ... they will swoop down on the slopes of Philistia to the west, together they will plunder the people to the east. They will lay hands on Edom and Moab, and the Ammonites will be subject to them."

⁵⁵ cf. Judges 3:9,15, Nehemiah 9:27

Until that time, though, we have work to do. As we look forward to the next "*day of the LORD*" – the Day when our Lord Jesus comes back to take us to be with him in heaven - may we boldly go out from Mount Zion with the precious gospel message that has the power to deliver all the spiritual Edomites of our world from the destruction that awaits them. May we boldly point them to Christ, our glorious and risen LORD! To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

S. D. G.

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