

## **MOUNT ZION & MOUNT ESAU: THE BOOK OF OBADIAH**

### **Week One: Obadiah's Message (Obadiah 1:1)**

Obadiah, the shortest book in the Old Testament, is rarely studied by Christians. Yet, while its prophecies were fulfilled by events that took place long before the birth of Jesus, its message still has important things to say to us. Obadiah's prophecy concerns the nation of Edom, which was inhabited by the descendants of Esau, the brother of Jacob. The relationship between these two brothers is significant to us in several ways.

In one sense, the book of Obadiah consists of a simple message of destruction for the nation of Edom, one of Israel's neighbors. With eloquence and brevity, the prophet spells out the reasons for God's judgment on Edom, and he also indicates what is going to happen. When we appreciate the background to the book, though, we can see that the lessons taught by Obadiah are still applicable in several ways that are of importance to Christians.

Obadiah wastes no time in declaring the "bottom line" of his vision (1:1). We know little about the prophet himself. His name, which means "servant of the Lord" was a very common one in ancient Israel. There are numerous Obadiah's in the Old Testament, but the prophet Obadiah is most likely not the same man as any of the others.

The prophet announces at once that he has a message from the Lord, who has decided to summon the nations, and to prepare them to do battle against the nation of Edom. That is, God is about to use the surrounding nations as instruments of judgment on Edom. Soon the prophet will explain why God has made this decision. But it is noteworthy that he tells them what he will do before explaining it. The Edomites are not weak but well-meaning sinners, who need patience and a chance to change. Rather, they have allowed their hearts to become hard, despite being given many chances, and all that God can do now is to use them as an example to others.

Next time, we shall take a look at some background information to the book of Obadiah. The book itself can be broken down as follows: first, Obadiah introduces his message against Edom (1:1), and then the prophet criticizes the Edomites for their pride (1:2-4). Obadiah next stresses the absolute certainty of God's judgment (1:5-9). He then details the sins that Edom has committed against Israel, since these sins were the biggest reason for God's judgment on the Edomites (1:10-15). The prophet then shifts his emphasis, assuring God's people of their deliverance (1:16-18), and concluding with the promise that "the kingdom will be the Lord's" (1:19-21).

In giving these messages, Obadiah uses the image of Mount Zion, corresponding to Israel, and he contrasts this with the image of Mount Edom, corresponding to the nation of Edom. From our perspective as Christians, these images can also be seen figuratively, as parallels of the church and the world, and this gives Obadiah's prophecies additional significance.

*- Mark Garner, Northland Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, December 2004*

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## **MOUNT ZION & MOUNT ESAU: THE BOOK OF OBADIAH**

### **Week Two: Israel & Edom**

Israel and Edom, the two countries with which Obadiah is concerned, are the nations descended from the twin brothers Jacob and Esau, whose turbulent relationship with each other is described in the book of Genesis (see Genesis 25:19-34, 27-28, 32-33). Though twins, and alike in certain respects, they had many differences in terms of their external personalities and, more importantly, in their attitudes towards God. Though both became the fathers of nations, they were often a bad and discouraging example in their relationship as brothers.

In a number of respects, Jacob and Esau parallel many human relationships throughout time. Though all humans were meant to consider themselves as part of the same family, this ideal has never been realized for even a short time. More specifically, we can see in Jacob and Esau some parallels to the relationship between Christians and the world. Even within the church, problems can arise that involve rivalries such as the one in which these brothers and their descendants indulged. All of these parallels give us reasons to be especially attentive to the lessons that Obadiah teaches.

Edom was a small but solid kingdom that lasted for many centuries. Its territory was in the mountains beyond the southern tip of the Dead Sea. To the west and northwest was Israel (or, in the Divided Kingdom era, Judah). To Edom's northeast was Moab, and to the east and south were the desert lands of Arabia (or, earlier in Edom's history, the Midianites). With its territory set in mountains that were not easily accessible, and with most of its borders covered by natural barriers to invasion, Edom often remained secure even when its neighbors underwent attack.

The history of Edom can be pieced together from a number of different sources, including the Old Testament. The kingdom ended in 553 BC, when the Babylonians apparently invaded Edom, deposed its rulers, ended Edom's independence forever, and deported many Edomites. All of this is similar to what Babylon had done with Judah and other countries. Over the years that followed, the process of resettling Edom's territory continued. Nomadic tribes from Arabia became the dominant group in the area, and by the 4th century BC the remaining descendants of Edom had been thoroughly dispersed.

Edom never again became a nation. Some individual families of Edom's descendants did survive, and by the time of Jesus Christ the remaining descendants of Edom were called Idumeans. It is interesting to note that the line of Herods were Idumeans, and thus, in a sense, for a time the ancient rivalry between Edom and Israel took on a new and different form.

But unlike Israel, Edom was never restored as a nation. God disciplined both nations firmly, but unbelieving Edom was disciplined once for all, while believing Israel was disciplined for its spiritual growth and cleansing. So too, Christians do not escape the pains and anxieties of living in this world. But whereas the worldly often suffer without learning or gaining anything from it, God can always use our sufferings to teach us and to help us grow.

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## **MOUNT ZION & MOUNT ESAU: THE BOOK OF OBADIAHf**

### **Week Three: Historical Background to Obadiah**

Obadiah is one of a handful of Old Testament books for which a definite date cannot be established beyond any doubt. Most likely, though, it was written sometime after 586 BC, when Babylon invaded and conquered Jerusalem, and before 553, when Babylon invaded and conquered the kingdom of Edom. Understanding the historical setting can help us better to learn and apply the lessons that Obadiah teaches.

On a technical note, commentators have proposed several different dates for Obadiah, based on many different ideas. Some of these theories, though, do not assume that the Bible is infallible. Since we know that the historical details in the Bible are completely accurate, there are then two main possibilities for the date of Obadiah. Since it was written in the aftermath of an attack on Jerusalem (verses 10-14), in which Edom turned against God's people, this indicates either a date sometime after 850 BC or a date sometime after 586 BC, with the latter by far more likely.

Edom's rebellion in about 850 BC or 845 BC is described in 2 Kings 8:20-22 and 2 Chronicles 21:8-17, and some commentators think that Obadiah could have been written soon afterwards. The main support for this theory is that the books of the "Minor" Prophets were originally arranged in a more-or-less chronological order, so that Obadiah could have been from the same general time period as Amos and Jonah. But this arrangement is not a rule, just a general trend. And, since there is no evidence from the Bible or from history that Edom's behavior in the crisis of 850 BC matches Obadiah 1:10-14, the book of Obadiah is probably not from this time period.

On the other hand, Obadiah's description corresponds very closely with events involved in the conquest of Jerusalem by Babylon in 586 BC. In fact, the whole prophecy fits very well into the era just after this event, making it the most likely date for the book, and the one most commonly accepted by commentators. There are also many similarities between Obadiah and Jeremiah 49:7-18, which suggests that God gave both prophets a similar message near the same time. Obadiah would thus have been written not many years before the fall of Edom in 553 BC, which again supports this possible date. In this case, Obadiah's message was probably associated with Amos due to the books sharing some similar themes, and thus Obadiah was placed just after Amos, despite being written in a different era.

All of this is significant first of all because it shows how completely and carefully God fulfills both his promises and his warnings. There are also some lessons for us in the history of Edom. Though Edom was a brother nation to Israel, they rarely acted like a brother, often resenting and sometimes attacking Israel without provocation. Although God was patient with the Edomites for many centuries, eventually he brought Edom down. So too, for a time we may have to endure many attacks in this world from the enemies of God. God is being patient with them, to give them the chance to repent. But we can be assured that eventually they, like Edom, will be judged. We should thus bear their persecutions with faith and patience, hoping that they will indeed repent, so that they will not have to be condemned after all.

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## **MOUNT ZION & MOUNT ESAU: THE BOOK OF OBADIAH**

### **Week Four: Edom's Pride (Obadiah 1:2-4)**

Much of the book of Obadiah details the reasons why God has passed judgment on Edom, and indicates the certainty of Edom's fall. Through time, the brotherly rivalry that began with Jacob and Esau developed into a hostility between the neighboring nations that descended from them. The Edomites, secure in their mountain strongholds, did not face nearly so many crises and upheavals as Israel endured over the centuries. The Edomites became proud, complacent, and opportunistic - and these qualities would eventually lead to their downfall.

Obadiah first asserts that Edom will fall in spite of its pride (1:2-4). He tells Edom that it has been deceived by "the pride of your heart". This is a failing that we can understand all too readily, since we are all vulnerable to the temptation of pride. Because of its seemingly secure position "in the clefts of the rocks", the Edomites developed a sense of false security, deluding themselves into thinking that they were invulnerable.

As with all who trust in worldly strengths, the day came when Edom's weakness and vulnerability would be exposed in drastic fashion. While pride was not the only reason for Edom's fall (in verses 10-14, God gives an even bigger reason for his judgment on them), there is little question that it contributed to all of the other sins for which they were eventually judged. Any sin is dangerous in itself, because it can pull us away from God if it is not checked. But a sin combined with pride is especially dangerous, since pride makes it more difficult to resist other sins, and more difficult to repent of those other sins. Therefore, the prophet says with certainty that Edom will be brought down.

Pride is, of course, one of the most common of human failings. Believers and unbelievers alike are tempted to be prideful. We can take pride in our abilities, our accomplishments, our family backgrounds, our social status, and many other things. Further, as the nation of Edom illustrates, whole groups of humans may become prideful. Just as whole nations can take undue pride in themselves, so also groups of Christians can become prideful about what they are or about what they have accomplished together. Therefore the prophet's warning is one that we should always take to heart, since pride can blind anyone at any time.

We can also learn another lesson from Edom's pride. One of the reasons for their false sense of confidence was that they had undergone fewer trials than Israel had. But instead of being thankful and humble, they became boastful. It is, unfortunately, human nature to boast over the fallen, and to give ourselves credit when we avoid the misfortunes that others face. As Christians, we should always realize that we need God's protection all of the time. When he allows us to face trials, we should learn from them and draw closer to God. When he delivers us from trials, we should give thanks humbly to God, and should have compassion on those who are less fortunate.

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## **MOUNT ZION & MOUNT ESAU: THE BOOK OF OBADIAH**

### **Week Five: The Certainty of Judgment (Obadiah 1:5-9)**

Obadiah next stresses the certainty of God's judgment (1:5-9). Not only will there be no escape for the Edomites, but the fall of Edom will be worse than if mere thieves had attacked them. The prophet foresees a thorough ransacking of Edom, with less remaining to them than there is in a field that has just been harvested. In its pride, Edom thought that it was completely secure, and the Edomites felt that they were safe to do as they pleased without worrying about retribution. They thought that their neighbors could do little, if anything, to harm them - yet the prophet tells them that in fact the whole nation can be eliminated in a moment, if and when it is God's will to do so.

Moreover, Edom will be betrayed by those it had considered friends and allies. Edom's leaders had enjoyed currying favor with other pagan nations, thinking that this gained them additional safety, but in the end Edom would be destroyed by these nations. Israel itself had learned this harsh lesson a number of times in its own history. The temptation to develop closeness with and dependence on powerful pagan nations often overcame Israel's better judgment. In most cases, it led to some small gains in the short term, but later on proved to be severely damaging.

Worldly friendships are just not the same as those based on a mutual belief and faith in God. Yet many Christians are exactly like the ancient Edomites and Israelites, in seeking the favor of the worldly who live around them. Because there have always been more unbelievers than believers, there is always a temptation to please the majority, and to do so can often give us a false sense of security. Yet the Scriptures repeatedly emphasize that we are not to be friends with the world, and we are not to be like the world. Their opinion of us only matters insofar as we ought not to do anything that brings disrepute on the church of Jesus Christ. Beyond that, it should not concern us whether the world likes either us, our church, or the ways that we serve God.

For, as the prophet warned Edom, God's judgment is certain. The things of this world will pass away, and each of us will be judged. There is a heaven for the faithful and a hell for the ungodly. The worldly do not believe these things, and they live their lives accordingly. Thus their influence on us can only be to draw us away from eternal, spiritual things. To seek to please the world will inevitably mean that we seek things of this world - whether possessions, entertainment, or renown - rather than devoting ourselves to seeking the things of God.

We ought therefore to renounce not only worldly ways, but also worldly perspectives. The Edomites viewed the world as a place to exploit for their own advantage, and they were destroyed as a result. We ought instead to view the world as a lost and dying planet, in which we, if we set the right example, can be a source of light and eternal hope.

*- Mark Garner, Northland Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, January 2005*

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## **MOUNT ZION & MOUNT ESAU: THE BOOK OF OBADIAH**

### **Week Six: Edom's Sins Against Israel (Obadiah 1:10-15)**

Now the prophet is ready to detail Edom's sins against Israel (1:10-15), the sins for which Edom's doom has been pronounced. For years, Edom had often rejoiced at the trials and sufferings of God's people, and now in the recent crisis (probably, as discussed in an earlier study, the invasion of 586 BC), Edom was again joyful over Israel's suffering. Worse still, this time Edom kicked his brother when he was down, instead of helping as a brother should.

In this time of crisis and despair for God's people (that is, when Babylon invaded and conquered Jerusalem), Edom did not do anything to help their neighbors and brothers. Rather, Edom looked to share in the plunder, and even (see verse 14) hunted down fleeing Israelites, to kill them and rob them. Moreover, when Jews who were trying to escape from the destruction in their homeland reached Edom safely, the Edomites did not offer them hospitality or protection, but rather handed them over with a cold heart to the invader, to receive brutal treatment.

Edom's motivation for this atrocious behavior was probably a combination of pride, jealousy, and selfishness. In their pride, they laughed at small nations that fell to large empires such as Babylon, little realizing that one day Edom too would learn what it felt like to be crushed and ruined. Also, in Edom's long-standing jealousy towards the more numerous and prosperous Jews, they hardened their hearts towards the Jews' sufferings, and refused to help. Finally, out of blind selfishness, Edom looked to gain favor with powerful nations by refusing to stand with their own neighbors against the invaders.

For all of this, says the prophet, the day of the Lord (that is, a day of judgment and retribution) will come soon for Edom. As Edom has done to others, so will God do to them. Since they showed no mercy, they will not be shown mercy. This principle has always been important to God, and Jesus himself often emphasized it with such sayings as "with the measure you use, it will be measured to you" (see Matthew 7:2, Mark 4:24, and Luke 6:38).

In our own relationships, we would do well to remember God's judgment on Edom, so that we do not rejoice over the misfortunes of others, whether they are our brothers, or whether we perceive them as rivals. Nor should we ever exploit, in any fashion, the sufferings or misfortunes of others. Our own pride, jealousy, and selfishness make this a challenge, but we must accept the challenge to overcome our fleshly desires, and we should strive to treat those in need as we know Jesus himself would have treated them.

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## **MOUNT ZION & MOUNT ESAU: THE BOOK OF OBADIAH**

### **Week Seven: A Promise of Deliverance (Obadiah 1:16-18)**

In contrast with the message that Edom received from Obadiah, Israel is assured of God's care, and of the eventual victory that God will give to her. Obadiah gives us a revealing look at the ways that God disciplines. God often disciplined his own people, sometimes in ways similar to the means that he would use to discipline Edom, but God never destroyed Israel. Edom, on the other hand, would soon be gone from the earth forever, while God's people would be restored and strengthened.

In these verses, the prophet shifts his emphasis from the denunciations of Edom. God now speaks to his own people (1:16-18), and for the rest of the book, when the prophet says "you", he is addressing the Israelites. And his message to them is one of deliverance from those who oppressed his people. Just as God's people drank of his discipline, and had no choice but to submit to it, so now they shall see their persecutors drink from the same cup.

For Mount Zion (Israel), there will now be deliverance and holiness, and Israel will be better and stronger for having been disciplined. In a spiritual sense, Jacob (Israel) will now be a raging fire that cannot be stopped, certainly not by Edom. Esau (Edom), on the other hand, will be like stubble, the sad and meager remains of a once proud and secure nation. While discipline made Israel stronger, it will leave Edom with no survivors.

Whenever we undergo God's discipline, we should always be thankful that we are being disciplined as Christians, since we can know that God will use it for good in the long run. Hebrews 12:4-11 explains to us that discipline from God is a natural part of the Father/child relationship. That passage also reminds us that discipline is not supposed to feel pleasant at the time. Its value comes in the long run, in the righteousness and spiritual fruit that it produces.

So we should not seek to avoid discipline, but rather should strive to focus our thoughts on God, so that when he does have to discipline us, it will be for a worthwhile, spiritual purpose. The worldly and pagans have no hope, and so every misfortune they suffer is for nothing if they do not use it to turn back to God. But for Christians, "our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all" (2 Corinthians 4:17), and "so we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen" (2 Cor. 4:18).

- *Mark Garner, Northland Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, January 2005*

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## **MOUNT ZION & MOUNT ESAU: THE BOOK OF OBADIAH**

### **Week Eight: The Kingdom Will Be the Lord's (Obadiah 1:19-21)**

The prophecy of Obadiah concludes with the promise that "the kingdom will be the Lord's" (1:19-21). This is an encouraging re-assurance to his own people, and also a warning to those who would oppose God or his people. Everything belongs to God, even though, in his patience, he allows humans to do as they please for a time with the things God has given them. We must never doubt for a moment that it all came from God, it all belongs to God, and someday it will all return to God. The nations of the world, the wealth of the world, the peoples of the world, even the church itself, are all God's, and no human should presume to be in control of anything.

In verses 19-20, the prophet uses geographical imagery to describe Israel recovering and possessing its own lost territory, and not only that. It also depicts God's people taking territory from neighboring lands, such as Edom and Philistia, who had been hostile to Israel. Then, in the last verse, Obadiah contrasts Mount Zion and "Mount Esau", saying that God's people will live on Mount Zion and will rule both mountains. (Although the NIV translates this as "the mountains of Esau", the Hebrew is singular. There is no literal "Mount Esau"; this is just a figurative expression to make a contrast with "Mount Zion".)

This imagery thus promises much more than simply the restoration of the ancient physical nation of Israel. For, even today, those of spiritual Israel are the true heirs of everything God has created, both the things of Mount Zion and the things of Mount Esau. Just as Daniel promised that God's kingdom shall shatter all worldly kingdoms (Daniel 2:44), and as Paul assured the Corinthians that "all things are yours, whether . . . the world or life or death or the present or the future" (1 Corinthians 3:21-22), so also Obadiah assures us, as Jesus does too, that the meek, patient, and humble servants of God shall indeed inherit the earth.

These promises should re-assure us about the path in life we have chosen. There is a kingdom waiting for us, and it is a kingdom worth more than all the treasures of the earth put together. In following Christ, we have made not only the right choice, but also the wise choice. Yet this assurance should also challenge us. The kingdom of heaven is our ultimate reward, and "if only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men" (1 Corinthians 15:19). Even Christians can easily fall into worldly ways of thinking, and can look to Christianity as a source of entertainment and earthly benefit, rather than eternal security and spiritual development. For all of these reasons, Obadiah's reminder that "the kingdom will be the Lord's" ought to be written on our hearts.

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## **MOUNT ZION & MOUNT ESAU: THE BOOK OF OBADIAH**

### **Notes, Discussion Questions, & Bibliography**

*Obadiah, the shortest book in the Old Testament, is rarely studied by Christians. Yet, while its original prophecies were fulfilled by events that took place long before the birth of Jesus, its message still has important things to say to us. Obadiah's prophecy concerned the nation of Edom, which descended from Esau, whose brother was Jacob, also known as Israel.*

#### ***Introduction & Background (Obadiah 1:1)***

In one sense, the book of Obadiah consists of a simple message of destruction for the nation of Edom, one of Israel's neighbors. With eloquence and brevity, the prophet spells out the reasons for God's judgment on Edom, and indicates what is going to happen. When we appreciate the background to the book, though, we can see that the lessons taught by Obadiah are still applicable in ways that are of interest to Christians.

Obadiah wastes no time in declaring the "bottom line" of his vision (1:1)\*. We know little about the prophet himself. His name, which means "servant of the Lord" was a very common one in ancient Israel. There are numerous Obadiah's in the Old Testament, but the prophet Obadiah is most likely not the same man as any of the others. Aside from the prophet, the best-known Obadiah is probably the one who was in charge of King Ahab's palace (1 Kings 18:1-17).

\* Since Obadiah is only one chapter long, many commentators and reference books omit the chapter number and use only verse numbers (for example, writing Obadiah 3 to mean the third verse of the book). Other writers refer to the whole book as chapter one, so that the system of chapter and verse numbers remains consistent with the references used for other books of Scripture. These notes will use this latter approach.

The prophet announces at once that he has a message from the Lord, who has decided to summon the nations, to prepare them to do battle against the nation of Edom. That is, God is about to use the surrounding nations as an instrument of judgment on Edom. Shortly, the prophet will explain why God has made this decision. Before proceeding in the book, we shall first take a look at some background information.

The first question in considering the background to Obadiah is the uncertain date of the book. Since Obadiah does not provide any definitive historical benchmarks, commentators have proposed several different dates, based on many different ideas. Some of their theories, though, do not assume that the Bible is infallible. Since we shall begin with the understanding that the Bible's history is completely accurate, there are then two main possibilities for the date of Obadiah. The one piece of evidence that the prophet gives us is that his prophecy was made in the aftermath of some kind of attack on Jerusalem (see verses 10-14), in which Edom turned against God's people and added to their woes. Fitting this in with historical considerations leaves us with either a date sometime after 850 BC or a date sometime after 586 BC.

In about 850 BC or 845 BC, Edom rebelled against the regional leadership of Israel and Judah, and hoped to get help from other nearby nations (this is mentioned in 2 Kings 8:20-22 and 2

Chronicles 21:8-17). Obadiah could then have been written any time during the immediately following period, in which Edom aggressively asserted its independence. The main support for this theory is that the shorter prophetic books were originally arranged in a more-or-less chronological order, and this would put Obadiah in the same general time period with the books just before it and just after it. The main drawback to the theory is that neither the internal evidence of the Bible nor the external historical evidence matches very closely with the details of Edom's behavior in this crisis as described in Obadiah 1:10-14.

On the other hand, Obadiah's description corresponds very closely with events involved in the conquest of Jerusalem by Babylon in 586 BC. In fact, the whole prophecy fits very well into the era just after this event, making it the most likely date for the book, and the one most commonly assumed by commentators\*. There are also many similarities between Obadiah and Jeremiah 49:7-18, which suggests that God gave both prophets a similar message near the same time. Obadiah would thus have been written not many years before the fall of Edom in 553 BC (see below), which again supports this possible date.

\* If this is correct, the only thing it does not explain is why Obadiah was not placed later in the collection of shorter prophetic books. The Bible does not say, of course, that they are in chronological order, so we do not have to assume that this is an unbreakable rule. It is possible that Obadiah's message was associated with Amos due to some similar themes, and was thus placed just after Amos, even if written in a different era.

Israel and Edom are the nations descended from the twin brothers Jacob and Esau, whose turbulent relationship with each other is described in the book of Genesis (Genesis 25:19-34, 27-28, 32-33). Though twins, and alike in certain respects, they had many differences in terms of their external personality and, more importantly, their attitudes towards God. Though both, and especially Jacob, became the fathers of great nations, they were often a bad and discouraging example in their relationship as brothers. In this respect, they parallel so many human relationships in any era. Though all humans were meant to consider themselves as part of the same family, this ideal has never been realized for even a short time. More specifically, we can see in Jacob and Esau some parallels to the relationship between Christians and the world. Even within the church, rivalries such as that in which these brothers and their descendants indulged can be a problem. All of these parallels give us reason to be especially attentive to the lessons that Obadiah teaches.

Historically, the nation of Edom was a small but sturdy kingdom for many centuries. Geographically, Edom's territory was in the mountains beyond the southern tip of the Dead Sea. To their west and northwest, on the west of the Dead Sea, was Israel (or, in the Divided Kingdom era, Judah). To Edom's northeast was Moab, separated by the Zered River. To Edom's east and south were the desert lands of Arabia (and, earlier in Edom's history, the Midianites). With its territory set in mountains that were not easily accessible, and with most of its borders covered by natural barriers to invasion, Edom often remained secure even when their neighbors underwent attack.

Since Edom ceased to exist long before the time of Jesus, and since it was never a great nation like Assyria or Babylon that left ample remains of its culture, its history has to be pieced together from a number of different sources, including the Old Testament. From our perspective in studying Obadiah, the key date in Edom's history is 553 BC, when the Babylonians under King

Nabonidus apparently invaded Edom, deposed its rulers, and ended Edom's independence forever. Most likely, the Babylonians deported many Edomites, just as they had done with Judah and other countries. When Persia and Media in turn conquered Babylon, the process of resettling Edom's territory continued. Nomadic tribes from Arabia became the dominant group in the area, and by the 4th century BC the remaining descendants of Edom had been thoroughly dispersed. Edom never again became a nation\*.

\* Many individual families of Edom's descendants did survive, and by the time of Jesus Christ the remaining descendants of Edom were called Idumeans (from the Latin name for Edom and its people). It is interesting to note that the line of Herods were Idumeans, and thus, in a sense, for a time the ancient rivalry between Edom and Israel took on a new and different form.

Questions For Discussion or Study: Review the key events in the relationship between Jacob and Esau, as described in Genesis. In what ways might their relationship parallel the relations between Israel and Edom? In what ways is the relationship between Israel and Edom of importance to Christians? When we see the specifics of Obadiah's message, in what ways or areas might we be able to try applying them?

### ***Judgment on Edom (Obadiah 1:2-15)***

The largest portion of Obadiah details the reasons why God has passed judgment on Edom, and indicates the certainty of its fall. Through time, the brotherly rivalry that began with Jacob and Esau developed into a hostility between the neighboring nations that descended from them. The Edomites, secure in their mountain strongholds, did not face nearly so many crises and upheavals as did Israel over the centuries. The Edomites were proud, complacent, and opportunistic - and these qualities would eventually lead to their downfall.

Obadiah first asserts that Edom will fall in spite of its pride (1:2-4). He tells Edom that it has been deceived by "the pride of your heart". This is a failing that we can understand all too readily, since we are all vulnerable to the temptation of pride. Because of its seemingly secure position "in the clefts of the rocks", Edom developed a sense of false security, which was also an instance of self-delusion. As with all who trust in worldly strengths, the day came when Edom's weakness and vulnerability would be exposed in drastic fashion. While pride was not the direct reason for Edom's fall (God gives the immediate cause for his judgment in verses 10-14), there is little question that it contributed to all of the other sins for which they were eventually judged. Any sin is dangerous in itself, because it can pull us away from God if it is not checked. But a sin combined with pride is especially dangerous, since pride will make it more difficult to resist the sin, and more difficult to repent of the sin. Therefore the prophet says with certainty that Edom will be brought down.

Obadiah next stresses the certainty of God's judgment (1:5-9). There won't be any escape, and the fall of Edom will be worse than if mere thieves had attacked them. The prophet foresees a thorough ransacking of Edom, with less remaining to them than there is in a field that has just been harvested. Moreover, Edom will be betrayed by those it considered friends and allies. Edom's leaders had enjoyed currying favor with other pagan nations, but in the end Edom would be destroyed by them. Worldly friendships are just not the same as those based on a mutual belief and faith in God.

Now the prophet is ready to detail Edom's sins against Israel (1:10-15). For years, Edom often rejoiced at the trials and sufferings of God's people, and now in the recent crisis (whether in approximately 850 BC, or in 586 BC, as discussed above), Edom was again joyful over Israel's suffering. Worse still, this time Edom kicked his brother when he was down, instead of helping as a brother should. Edom looked to share in the plunder, and even (see verse 14) hunted down fleeing Israelites, to kill and rob them. Moreover, those Israelites whom Edom captured alive were handed over to the invader.

For all of this, says the prophet, the day of the Lord\* will come soon for Edom. As Edom has done to others, so will God do to them. Since they showed no mercy, they will not be shown mercy. This principle has always been important to God, and Jesus himself often emphasized it with such sayings as "with the measure you use, it will be measured to you" (Matthew 7:2, Mark 4:24, Luke 6:38). In our own relationships, we would do well to remember God's judgment on Edom, so that we do not rejoice over the misfortunes of others, whether they are brothers, or whether we perceive them as rivals. Nor should we ever exploit in any fashion the sufferings or misfortunes of others.

\* See the notes to the Joel class (week two) for a discussion of what "the day of the Lord" meant when the phrase was used by the Old Testament prophets.

Questions for Discussion or Study: In what way did Edom's pride contribute to its downfall? How does pride also hinder us from addressing sins or other problems in our lives? What were the primary things that Edom had done to warrant this judgment? In what ways might we be tempted to rejoice in our brothers' misfortunes? In what ways might we be tempted to take advantage of the sufferings of others? How can Obadiah's message help us to avoid this?

### ***Assurance For Israel (Obadiah 1:16-21)***

In contrast, Israel is assured of God's care and of the eventual victory that God will give to her. God often disciplined his people, but never destroyed them. Edom, however, was soon to be gone from the earth forever, while God's people would be restored and strengthened.

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The prophet now shifts his emphasis, as God now speaks to his own people (1:16-18)\*. Just as God's people drank of God's discipline, and had no choice but to submit to it, so now they shall see their persecutors drink from the same cup. For Mount Zion (Israel) there will now be deliverance and holiness, and Israel will be better and stronger for having been disciplined. In a spiritual sense, Jacob (Israel) will now be a raging fire that cannot be stopped, certainly not by Edom. Esau (Edom), on the other hand, will be like stubble, the sad and meager remains of a once secure nation. While discipline made Israel stronger, Edom shall be left no survivors. Whenever we undergo God's discipline, we should always be thankful that we are being disciplined as Christians, so that we know that God will use it for good in the long run.

\* That is, beginning in verse 16, when Obadiah says "you", he is now addressing the Israelites.

The prophecy of Obadiah concludes with the assurance that "the kingdom will be the Lord's"

(1:19-21). In verses 19-20, the prophet uses geographical imagery to describe Israel not just recovering and possessing its own lost territory, but also taking territory from neighboring lands such as Edom who had been hostile to Israel. Then, in the last verse, Obadiah contrasts Mount Zion and "Mount Esau"\*, saying that God's people will live on Mount Zion and will rule both mountains. This imagery promises much more than simply the restoration of the ancient physical nation of Israel. For even today those of spiritual Israel are the true heirs of everything God has created, even the things of Mount Esau. Just as Daniel promised that God's kingdom shall shatter all worldly kingdoms (Daniel 2:44), and as Paul assured the Corinthians that "all things are yours, whether . . . the world or life or death or the future" (1 Corinthians 3:21-22), so also Obadiah assures us, as does Jesus, that the meek, patient, and humble servants of God shall indeed inherit the earth.

\* Although the NIV translates this as "the mountains of Esau", the Hebrew is singular. There is no literal "Mount Esau"; this is just a figurative expression to make a contrast with "Mount Zion". The King James translates it as "the mount of Esau", and the New American Standard has "the mountain of Esau".

Questions For Discussion or Study: What would Obadiah's promises of deliverance and holiness have meant to his original audience? What should they mean to us? In what sense was Israel (Jacob) to be a flame, and Esau (Edom) stubble? Does this image mean anything for us now? What meaning would Obadiah's original audience get out of verses 19-21? Could any of them have understood the full meaning of these promises? What should these promises mean to us?

### ***Bibliography***

Most commentaries that cover Obadiah include the book with one or more of the other short prophetic books. Below is a selection of books on Obadiah. Each has different strengths - let me know if you would like ideas for doing further study on your own.

Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Minor Prophets 1* (New International Biblical Commentary)  
Leslie Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah* (New International Commentary)  
Baker, Alexander, & Waltke, *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah: Introduction & Commentary* (Tyndale)  
Alberto Ferreiro (editor), *The Twelve Prophets* (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture)  
Frank Gaebelin (editor), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Vol. 7: Daniel-Minor Prophets*  
James Limburg, *Hosea-Micah* (Interpretation Commentary)  
Paul Raabe, *Obadiah* (Anchor Bible)

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