

Abiding Fruit

Informing the Mind & Inflaming the Heart

Vol. 2 No. 41

July 1, 2007

As You Have Done Obadiah 15

The prophecy of Obadiah is unique in the Old Testament. First of all, as a book, it is only one chapter in length. Second, it is primarily about Edom and God's judgment upon that nation due to her treatment of Jacob. Third, it is about Jacob and the procurement by God of his salvation and blessing. This is not a book about individuals, namely; Jacob and Esau, though the foundation for the prophecy is rooted in those two boys. It is a prophecy about their descendents. The classic phrase used by Malachi and repeated by Paul; *"I have loved Jacob, but I have hated Esau"* (Mal. 1:2, 3; Rom. 9:13) finds its fullest expression in this book.

These words spoken by God are a reflection both upon Jacob and Esau as individuals before God and their descendents before God. The difficulty with the expression is only demonstrated by our expected anticipation of what we want and expect God to be. In other words, it is because we attribute our own motives to God that we find trouble with what God says. I am certain that we as believers speak in similar ways concerning the world of sin. Frankly speaking, there are things we love and cherish by virtue of the fact that we are the people of God, and in similar vein, we hate and despise certain things because we are God's people.

Ultimately, the election of Jacob rests completely in the Sovereign purposes of God. It is folly for believers to want to wrest this eternal purpose out of God's control or make it seem unfair in any respect. The purposes of God stand firm and resolute, and not even Jacob or Esau or anyone else for that matter can change them. You might object, why should I pray then, if nothing can change? You should pray because prayer is one of the means that God uses to bring about His purposes. A reed in the wind will blow precisely the way God has ordained for it to blow in a particular way and on a particular day. All the secondary causes necessary to make that reed blow in such a way are brought about by God. To our feeble minds we never really think of these things in this way, because we simply take for granted their occurrence, but it is ultimately and always God who brings it about.

Obadiah is a book that reflects these truths. The prophecy begins with acknowledgement that Obadiah is the author (*"the vision of Obadiah"* - 1:1). Obadiah often mentions Jerusalem, Judah and Zion which seems to indicate that he was from the Southern Kingdom of Judah (vv. 10 – 12; 17, 21). There are at least 13 Obadiah's mentioned in the Bible. It is difficult to determine the date but it is linked to a violent assault upon the city of Jerusalem in which the Edomites (Esau's descendents) took part. The Old Testament mentions four invasions of Jerusalem. The first was by Shishak of Egypt (926 B. C. This took place during the reign of Rehoboam (1 Kings 14:25 ff; 2 Chron. 12). The second was by a coalition of the Philistines and Arabs (ca. 840's B.C.) when Jehoram was king of Judah (2 Chron. 21). The third invasion took place during the reign of Jehoash (Joash) of Israel (N. Kingdom) in about 790 B.C. (2 Kings 14; 2 Chron, 25). The final invasion is the famous destruction by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in 586 B.C. (2 Kings 24, 25). The best options are the attack by the Philistine / Arab confederacy or by Nebuchadnezzar. During Shishak's time, Edom was in subjection to Judah so this is unlikely. I have always inclined to the Babylonian invasion because of Psalm 137:7 which indicates that Edom desired the complete destruction of Jerusalem. Good arguments can be made for the invasion by the Philistines and Arabs in the 840's B.C. Obadiah 11 speaks of "strangers" and "foreigners" (could be Philistines or Babylonians), but it also speaks of "casting lots"

which would be a questionable practice for Nebuchadnezzar to assume (since he was bent on destruction, however, the casting of the lots may be a reference to seeking some sort of spiritual approval from his gods, etc). Obadiah does not mention the enemy (either Philistia/Arabia or Babylon) whereas other prophets mention Babylon often (therefore, it is argued, Obadiah would have mentioned Babylon). I do not find this reasoning or argument compelling. It must be granted that the Old Testament prophets who spoke of Babylon's coming invasion all spoke in terms of utter destruction. This can be seen in the language used by Obadiah in verses 10 – 14.

The conflict between Esau and Jacob began in the womb of their mother Rebekah (Gen. 25:21 - 26; Rom. 9:10 – 13). In Numbers 20:14 – 21, the Edomites (Esau) refused to allow Israel to pass through their territory on their way to Canaan. The Edomites opposed King Saul and were subdued by David and Solomon. They experienced times of victory over Israel and Judah, but were also subjugated by the Assyrians and Babylonians. In the 5th Century, the Edomites were forced to leave their stronghold and region of Seir by the Nabateans. They moved to southern Palestine and became known as the Idumeans. Herod the Great was an Idumean. It is ironic that at the time of the birth of the Lord Jesus a descendent of Esau was on Israel's throne (under Roman permission, of course). Herod the Great sought the destruction of Jesus (the true King of Israel). This was simply another satanic attempt to destroy the Messiah and His line. Edom's final demise occurred in A.D 70 with the destruction of Jerusalem. Titus destroyed them. Obadiah refers to Edom's complete destruction in verses 10 and 18 (*"you shall be cut off forever"*, and *"there shall be no survivor for the house of Esau"*).

In this prophecy, Obadiah offers no hope to Esau. There is no grace for them. They are to be completely destroyed with no remnant left. This is in direct contrast to Israel of whom God saves a remnant. Obadiah brings God's judgment upon Esau in the form of his prophecy. It is an indictment and judgment wrapped in one. Verse 1 – 18 reflects on Edom's destruction and verses 19 – 21 on Jacob's restoration. God's judgment of Esau is not a mere conjecture or condition, but rather is a certainty. Edom is arrogant and vain, thinking themselves secure in their mountain fortress of Petra (or Sela). God speaks utter destruction to them (see vv. 1 – 10). Why will God destroy? It was because they refused to aid their brother Jacob in the time of his trouble (see. 10 – 14). God's Day of Judgment was coming (called the *"day of the Lord"* in verse 15). Many see this as a reference to the end times, but a careful reading of Obadiah and the knowledge of history indicates that this has already occurred. This took place when Titus destroyed them in AD 70. Their punishment by God was because *"as you have done, it shall be done to you; your deeds shall return on your own head"* (vs. 15). This day is described as "near" (קָרוֹב qarowb) which means near, nigh or at hand. God will soon punish Edom is what Obadiah is saying. This would be an encouragement to Jacob in the light of the treachery experienced. God does promise restoration for Jacob. This restoration encompasses possession of Edom's territory (as well as Philistine territory – see vs. 19).

Ultimately, the Lord shall restore the fortunes of His remnant people (vs. 20). This can be a reference to either their imminent post-exilic return or the future outpouring of salvation upon the believing remnant of Israel (Rom. 11:2,5, 7, 23, 25 – 27), and thus be a fulfillment of the New Covenant promised by Jeremiah (Jer. 31:31 – 34; 32:36 – 41; 33:3 – 9,14 – 22, 25). The kingdom is the Lord's because Jesus the Deliver has come. The kingdom in Scripture is an ongoing work by God (past, present and future). It has been, it is and it shall be. The kingdom is made up of the saints of God. There are no Edomites in the congregation of the righteous. There are no unbelievers in God's kingdom. Christ shall cut off all His enemies. Hebrews 12:22 tells us that we have already come to Mount Zion and to the City of God, the New Jerusalem. We are part of this heavenly congregation of which Jesus is the Mediator of this New Covenant (Heb. 12:22 – 24). Our responsibility is to see that we do not refuse Him who speaks – we are a receiving an unshakeable kingdom, and so let us worship God with reverence and awe because the God who destroyed Edom is a consuming fire, doing to them as they desired to do to Jacob.