

Obadiah • The Classic Struggle

Introduction

What began as a personal struggle between brothers has been handed down from Jacob and Esau to their descendants to this very day. Although it originated with literal issues among literal people, it has escalated to many different issues both physical and spiritual, and extending to people and groups beyond the local neighborhood, so to speak. The lesson here is not just what God has, is, and will do historically, but what is going on and applicable spiritually to each of us personally. Obadiah isn't the only Scripture devoted exclusively to Edom. God has spoken extensively in Isaiah 34:5-15, Ezekiel 25:12-14 and 35:1-15, and Amos 1:11-12 as well. What God once communicated through His prophets to a now-extinct people still resonates with lessons applicable for every generation through this present one, with an eye toward an ultimate, final fulfillment yet to come.

¹The vision of Obadiah.

Thus says the Lord GOD concerning Edom—

We have heard a report from the LORD,
And an envoy has been sent among the nations saying,
“Arise and let us go against her for battle”—

²“Behold, I will make you small among the nations;

You are greatly despised.

³The arrogance of your heart has deceived you,

You who live in the clefts of the rock,
In the loftiness of your dwelling place,
Who say in your heart,

‘Who will bring me down to earth?’

⁴Though you build high like the eagle,
Though you set your nest among the stars,

From there I will bring you down,”
declares the LORD.

⁵If thieves came to you,
If robbers by night—

O how you will be ruined!—

Would they not steal only until they had enough?

If grape gatherers came to you,

Would they not leave some gleanings?

⁶O how Esau will be ransacked,

And his hidden treasures searched out!

[Read v.1-4]

Q: What is Edom's root problem?

A: Pride: “The arrogance of your heart has deceived you”. (v.3)

Q: Are the descriptions of Edom living “in the clefts of the rock”, or that their dwelling place is “in loftiness”, or that they “build high like the eagle” a series of metaphors about them?

A: Edom's cities were literally carved out of rock in mountains, a kind of literal description that lets us know that this Scripture is historically accurate. It could also supplement the description of their root problem of pride, but they are all literally valid descriptions of the original people.

Point: One of the problems with pride is that it deceives to the point of making one believe they are untouchable, even invincible. They think they're above God's Word, will, and ways.

Application: How does this describe someone different from a Believer who's merely struggling with sin or backsliding? How are people infected with pride different than others?

[Read v.5-6]

Q: What is God teaching about the kind of judgment caused by sin rooted in pride?

A: Discipline won't do. The very definition of someone given over to pride means that they're unresponsive to discipline. It is so destructive that it can't be allowed to go on and must be completely destroyed.

Point: Pride is the source of Satan's character, an example showing that destruction is the inevitable response of God to take care of it.

⁷All the men allied with you
Will send you forth to the border,
And the men at peace with you
Will deceive you and overpower you.
They who eat your bread
Will set an ambush for you.
(There is no understanding in him.)

⁸Will I not on that day,” declares the
LORD,
“Destroy wise men from Edom
And understanding from the mountain of
Esau?
⁹Then your mighty men will be dismayed,
O Teman,
So that everyone may be cut off from the
mountain of Esau by slaughter.

¹⁰“Because of violence to your brother
Jacob,
You will be covered with shame,
And you will be cut off forever.
¹¹On the day that you stood aloof,
On the day that strangers carried off his
wealth,
And foreigners entered his gate
And cast lots for Jerusalem—
You too were as one of them.
¹²Do not gloat over your brother’s day,
The day of his misfortune.
And do not rejoice over the sons of Judah
In the day of their destruction;
Yes, do not boast
In the day of their distress.
¹³Do not enter the gate of My people
In the day of their disaster.
Yes, you, do not gloat over their calamity
In the day of their disaster.
And do not loot their wealth
In the day of their disaster.
¹⁴Do not stand at the fork of the road
To cut down their fugitives;
And do not imprison their survivors
In the day of their distress.

[Read v.7-9]

Q: To whom and what is God referring to by “the men allied with you” and “the men at peace with you”?

A: Edom made alliances with the other nations against their brother Israel instead of supporting them. Historically what is stated here is exactly what happened to Edom: the nations they joined with to persecute Israel turned on Edom.

Q: How does God identify Edom’s root problem that causes them to enter into such ultimately destructive relationships?

A: He declares it is because they have no spiritual “wise men” or “understanding”. They lack the spiritual discernment necessary to see where such bad relationships will eventually lead, as failure to being able to see the benefits that would come from supporting their brothers.

Application: How many times have you **NOT** been surprised by the results of someone’s bad choices and relationships? How well do you consider the spiritual relationship between victory and obedience to God’s Word?

[Read v.10-14]

Q: How did Edom act towards Israel? What is the nature of their actions for which God is holding them accountable?

A: Although they rarely participated directly, they regularly stood by and not only allowed Israel’s destruction to occur, and even encouraged it to happen, but rejoiced at their downfall. Just as our legal system holds someone accountable for being an accessory to murder for not doing anything to stop the crime, so God holds Edom responsible in the same manner.

Observation: This is the exact sin of the priest and the Levite in the Parable of the Good Samaritan. (Luke 10:31-33) They didn’t **cause** the initial crime, but neither did they pause to help.

Q: What specifically did they do?

- “...you stood aloof [as]...strangers carried off his wealth...” – Allowed the crime to happen with not even an attempt at intervention.
- “...cast lots for Jerusalem...” – Sought to take their share of the spoil, side-by-side with Israel’s enemies.
- **Gloated** over “his misfortune”, **rejoiced** in “their destruction”, and **boasted** in “their distress” – They were actually happy at Israel’s fate.
- Looted “their wealth” – Went in behind the others and took Israel’s possessions for themselves.
- “Cut down their fugitives” and imprisoned “their survivors in the day of their distress” – They physically attacked their brothers when they were the weakest and most in need of their support.

Point: Just like Satan, the chief tactic of the prideful is to let others do as much of the work as possible beforehand and to pounce when you’re the most vulnerable and weakest.

¹⁵“For the day of the LORD draws near on all the nations.

As you have done, it will be done to you. Your dealings will return on your own head.

¹⁶Because just as you drank on My holy mountain,

All the nations will drink continually.

They will drink and swallow

And become as if they had never existed.

¹⁷But on Mount Zion there will be those who escape,

And it will be holy.

And the house of Jacob will possess their possessions.

¹⁸Then the house of Jacob will be a fire

And the house of Joseph a flame;

But the house of Esau will be as stubble.

And they will set them on fire and

consume them,

So that there will be no survivor of the house of Esau,”

For the LORD has spoken.

[Read v.15-18]

Q: What is the well-established biblical principle here invoked by God?

A: You will reap what you have sown. Jesus will state it, “*Treat others the same way you want others to treat you.*” (Luke 6:31)

Q: What is God referring to in v.16 regarding drinking?

A: A common biblical symbol is “*the cup of God’s wrath*”. In this case, whereas Israel will drink of it temporarily as a consequence of their own sin, Edom and the others gathered against Israel will drink permanently to the point of experiencing total destruction for their own sins. It contrasts the sins of Israel with those of Edom. This is confirmed in v.17 in describing Israel’s escape and re-establishment.

Q: Why might the phrase in v.17 that “Jacob will possess their possessions” sound a little odd? What is the meaning being conveyed?

A: Even in exile, the physical things of the land of Israel belong to God’s people Israel. The meaning is that God does not simply intend a spiritual restoration alone, but that everything originally intended for them – the land, Jerusalem, the temple, the priesthood, etc. – will be physically restored to them.

Observation: *Although a return to the land has begun and continues, the Jews today still find themselves in the position described by Hosea as without a king, priest, sacrifice, or the priesthood. This will not happen until their spiritual revival centered on the acceptance of Jesus as Messiah.*

For the sons of Israel will remain for many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar and without ephod or household idols. Afterward the sons of Israel will return and seek the Lord their God and David their king; and they will come trembling to the Lord and to His goodness in the last days.

Hosea 3:4-5

Q: Which present-day country or people are descended from Edom?

A: It’s a trick question. They became extinct in the wake of the Roman destruction of Israel in 70 A.D. What God stated in v.18 has literally come true, “*there will be no survivor of the house of Esau*”.

¹⁹Then those of the Negev will possess the mountain of Esau,

And those of the Shephelah the Philistine plain;

Also, possess the territory of Ephraim and the territory of Samaria,

And Benjamin will possess Gilead.

²⁰And the exiles of this host of the sons of Israel,

Who are among the Canaanites as far as Zarephath,

And the exiles of Jerusalem who are in Sepharad

Will possess the cities of the Negev.

²¹The deliverers will ascend Mount Zion

To judge the mountain of Esau,

And the kingdom will be the LORD’S.

[Read v.19-21]

Q: How would you summarize the reason for these geographical descriptions?

A: They describe the original length and breadth of the land God originally intended for Israel to possess. The point is that God will complete that work and, in the end, they will take possession of everything God originally intended.

Q: What is important about closing these remarks with the statement, “And the kingdom will be the LORD’S”?

A: Not only will Israel ultimately possess physically everything God originally intended from an earthly point of view, but they will receive everything spiritually as well.

Point: *The final fulfillment of all of God’s promises have a dual fulfillment in that one day Israel will be both physically and spiritually restored.*

For Your Consideration

God decreed that certain, specific persons, groups, and/or nations would be entirely destroyed, never to be heard from again. This is true not only for Edom, but others such as Babylon, Nineveh, Jezebel, and so forth. Every one of them were literal people or groups who came to a literal end just as God declared. However, they are mentioned again throughout the Bible. They existed and were dealt with literally, but they also continue to exist as what we call “biblical types”, spiritual examples used to teach greater spiritual truths and even foreshadowing or prefiguring greater, like events or people to come. Babylon was gone for many centuries when Peter referred to Rome as “Babylon”, and has been extinct another couple of thousand years on top of that even though Babylon is prominent in the book of Revelation for us this very day.

Q: What is the biblical typology of Jacob and Esau? What greater teaching do they represent?

A: It's the struggle of the “flesh” (Esau) versus the “Spirit” (Jacob). [Note: If you have time, re-read Obadiah in this light.]

Q: How might Esau typify the “flesh”?

A: Esau was the handsome, athletic, outgoing man who had everything going for him from man's typically shallow point of view. Spiritually, however, he proved himself not very deep in his renouncement of his birthright in exchange for a bowl of soup. His behavior was to live according to the flesh – man's ways – as opposed to God's.

Q: How might Jacob typify the “Spirit”?

A: Although he was basically a selfish homebody who had none of the appealing physical characteristics of his brother, what Jacob **DID** have was God's grace. Everything ultimately came through Jacob – God's people, God's Word, God's salvation – as a teaching that it is not the result of merit, but God's grace or choice of **US**. Whereas Esau gave up spiritual fights fairly easily as in the example of selling his birthright, Jacob actually wrestled with God, attempting to resolve such issues.

Q: Are there other biblical examples of this struggle of Esau vs. Jacob, the flesh vs. the Spirit?

A: The Herods were all Edomites.

- One Herod killed all the male, Jewish babies in an attempt to eliminate the Messiah, the rightful King of Israel.
- Another Herod killed John the Baptist.
- Yet another Herod killed the apostle James.
- David conquered Edom, and Christ's Second Coming will be in the person of David, the “Conquering King”.

Q: How does this continue to this very day?

A: The Jews and Arabs (other descendants of Esau) are locked in both physical and spiritual battle – as they have throughout all of history – until the return of Christ.

Overall Application

- *How have you at times been more like Esau than Jacob? Have you ever been a passive participant in someone else's struggles? Although you may not have started something, did you also not do anything to address it?*
 - *How do you deal with the battle of the flesh vs. the Spirit? Do you see that's it's not merely a personal issue, but corporate for the whole church as well?*
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