

Obadiah

The Church at Gun Hill

The Vision of Obadiah

This, the shortest book in the Old Testament, is the vision of Obadiah – “the servant of the Lord”. He is not the Obadiah who lived in the time of Elijah and King Ahab but, as we shall see from some later verses, seems to have written after the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar’s armies. His prophetic vision, concerning Esau/Edom and Jacob/Israel, reveals the judgment to come upon Edom, a judgment upon arrogant pride, godlessness and violent cruelty carried out against the people of God. It is interesting to observe that when the Lord speaks to the ungodly or to the enemies of Israel, He always speaks well of His people. God put the word in Balaam’s mouth to speak to Balak, King of Moab, a word which declared, **“He has not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither has He seen perverseness in Israel.”** (Numbers 23 v 21); of Satan God demanded, **“Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man...?”** (Job 1 v 8). And to us the Word of God comes in mighty assurance, **“There is now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.”** (Roman 8 v 1).

An Ancient and Ongoing Conflict

The conflict between Edom and Israel began with the twins Esau and Jacob, even before they were born, in the womb of Rebekah: **“And the children struggled together within her... and the Lord said unto her, Two nations are in your womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from your bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger.”** (Genesis 25 vv 22 & 23). Esau was the firstborn but Jacob, who followed, was holding on to his heel and thus was given the name Jacob, meaning a “heel-catcher”, a supplanter, one who seeks to overturn others. Esau **“came out red, all over like a hairy garment”** (Genesis 25 v 25) and was thus given his name which means ‘rough’ or ‘hairy’. Later, he and his descendants are called Edom, a name which is related to Adam and means red or ruddy. Adam has a similar meaning of ‘ruddy’ and ‘ground’, the name being an indication that Adam was made from the ‘red’ fertile earth.

As they grew into manhood, Esau’s real character emerged. Returning from the field, exhausted, no doubt, after a lengthy period of hunting, and on the point of expiring, he sold his birthright to Jacob for a cheap meal of bread and lentil stew. His attitude was demonstrated in his question, **“Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me?”** (Genesis 25 v 32) He despised his birthright. He was a man with no spiritual perspective on life; he saw no need for God and what God could give him. To all appearances he was a decent sort of person, but, like many in today’s modern world, he was an “I did it my way” man. As Adam and the whole human race born from Adam, he was of the earth, earthy (I Corinthians 15 v 47). Later, he who despised his birthright lost the blessing – and that carried with it material implications which he did want.

The Edomites, the descendants of Esau, bore the same attitude and character as their ancestor. They were engaged in repeated acts of violence, aggression and cruelty against Israel, the descendants of Jacob. Jacob, the heel-catcher, always looking to manipulate situations and people, sought God and God’s blessing and became a new person, Israel, a ‘prince with God’. When Israel requested a safe passage along the so-called ‘King’s Highway’ through Edom’s territory of Mount Seir and into the

Promised Land, Edom refused. When the Israelites promised that they would pass through without touching or taking anything, Edom's response was to come out against them with threats of aggression and violence to turn them away. (Numbers 20 vv 14-21).

An interesting incident which illustrates the godless character of the people is contained in the story of David when he was seeking to keep out of the way of King Saul. He came to Ahimelech, the priest, who fed him and his men with hallowed bread and gave to him the sword of Goliath. When Saul was angry that no one was giving him information about David's movements and whereabouts, it was Doeg, an Edomite, who informed on him. When no Israelite soldier would dare obey Saul's order to kill the priests of the Lord, it was Doeg the Edomite who cruelly slaughtered eighty five defenceless priests in cold blood.

During the time of the divided kingdom after King Solomon, the Edomites were a constant source of trouble and engaged in alliances against Israel.

Then, when Jesus was born and the wise men came seeking the one that had been born King of the Jews, it was Jesus to Whom the star led them. He was of Israel, of the house of Jacob. It stands in His genealogy in Matthew 1 v 2. However, the person who held the title, King of the Jews, at the time was Herod. He was an Edomite and he showed towards Jesus the violence and cruelty that had always been the mark of his people.

It is no surprise, therefore, to find that God declared through Malachi the prophet, when the nation of Israel was questioning God's love for them, ***"Was not Esau Jacob's brother? ...yet I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau... the people against whom the Lord has indignation for ever"*** (Malachi 1 v 2-4). Thus they both become examples to us, Esau of the earth-bound, godless mortals who rely with pride and self-confidence on their own abilities and efforts and, therefore remaining as all that are of Adam, under the judgment of God, and Jacob of those who are spiritual and, therefore, seek the Lord and His blessing and deliverance. The ancient conflict continues to ensure that the elder, that which is of Adam and earthy, serves the younger, that which is born of God and is heavenly (1 Corinthians 15 vv 45-50). What a privilege it is to be of those who are the objects of God's love and who have the birthright because they have the right birth: ***"But as many as received Him, to them gave He power (the authority, the right) to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."*** (John 1 vv 12 & 13)

A Rumour From the Lord

From olden times there has been a rumour from the Lord and a messenger to the nations to rise up against Edom in battle, for the Lord will bring the arrogant and lofty one down. Pride always goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall (Proverbs 16 v 18).

We can find the beginning of this rumour in the revelation that God gave through Balaam, despite the latter's unwillingness: ***"...there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth. And Edom shall be a possession, Seir also shall be a possession for his enemies; and Israel shall do valiantly."*** (Numbers 24 vv 17 & 18)

The rumour was picked up also by Jeremiah. Writing before Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Babylon, he announced, ***"I have heard a rumour from the Lord, and an ambassador is sent to the heathen, saying, Gather together, and come against her, and rise up to the battle. For, lo, I will make you***

small among the heathen, and despised among men...” (Jeremiah 49 vv 14f.) And the following verses contain a warning of judgment and utter destruction for Edom.

The rumour began following their refusal to allow passage through their territory and into the Promised Land - a refusal accompanied by threats of violence and aggression. After repeated incidents of aggressive challenges from Edom against Judah, Jeremiah repeated the warning of coming destruction and desolation. Amos had earlier explained the reasons for such punishment: ***“Thus says the Lord; for three transgressions of Edom and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because he did pursue his brother with the sword, and did cast off pity, and his anger did tear perpetually, and he kept his wrath forever.”*** (Amos 1 v 11)

It was after the Babylonians had destroyed Jerusalem and taken many of the leading Jews into captivity, that Obadiah applied the rumour from the Lord again. During the time of the enemy onslaught against Jerusalem, the Edomites had taken advantage of the situation to bring misery and suffering to God’s people in the cruellest of ways. Verses 11 to 14 explain how they had joined forces with the foreign enemy against their ‘brother’, rejoicing arrogantly over their sorry and desperate plight. They entered into their holy city, using the opportunity to take much plunder and cutting off any means of escape for God’s people, whom they handed over to the enemy. Their lot would be to be punished in the same way as the godless nations, the heathen. Justice demands that ***“as you have done, it shall be done unto you.”*** Again and again the warning, the rumour from the Lord, was repeated; again and again it was ignored. But God’s word stands fast. What He says, He will do. A godless world today mocks the idea of a coming day of reckoning. As Peter prophesied, the scoffers will cry out, ***“Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.”*** Then he adds, ***“But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men... But the Day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night...”*** (II Peter 3 vv 4, 7 & 10)

The Profane Man

All the characteristics of Esau and Edom are those of a profane man. He is profane because he is elevated with pride in himself, thinking himself to be unassailable. In rocky fortress territory such as Petra or in militarily advantageous positions, high above any attacker, he prides himself as being invincible, untouchable and the master of his own destiny. Therefore, he has no time or room for God. He is earthbound with no spiritual outlook on life. We need to heed the warning in the New Testament: ***“Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled; lest there be any fornicator or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.”*** (Hebrews 12 vv 15 & 16) In Greek the word translated as ‘profane’ is βεβηλος which signifies ‘crossing or stepping over a threshold’. What the profane person does is to cross over the threshold into the holy place, the place of God. It was in the mind of Satan in the beginning: ***“For you have said in your heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation in the sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most high.”*** (Isaiah 14 vv 13 & 14) It was planted in the mind of Eve and Adam in the Garden of Eden, ***“You shall be as Elohim (God), knowing good and evil.”*** (Genesis 3 v 5) Lucifer fell from heaven as lightning. Adam and Eve were cast out of the garden with no access to the Tree of Life. Obadiah saw the same problem and result for Edom: ***“The pride of your heart has deceived you, you that dwells in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high; that says in his heart, “Who shall bring me down to the ground?”***

Though you exalt yourself as the eagle, and though you set your nest among the stars, thence will I bring you down, says the Lord of hosts.” (Obadiah vv 3 & 4)

It is said by many scholars that, unlike the Moabites, the Ammonites and so on, the Edomites were a people who had no gods. In that, Edom was much like our present age of self-elevation, where so many with an extensive knowledge of modern science, confidently assert that there is no God and that man knows all that we need to know. They feel safe in what they take to be the proven fortresses of evolutionary theory and the human understanding and explanations of the universe around us from sub-atomic ideas to all the modern theories of cosmology. God, they feel, is not needed anymore. In their view, He should be displaced. Man knows better. Rudeness and arrogance in their own achievements and understanding forbid their entertaining or allowing into their lives any notion of a spiritual realm. They have lifted themselves up as gods, high above the stars. They have crossed the threshold to trample underfoot the holy. They are utterly profane and God declares to them as to all the heathen, “I will bring you down.” And when God’s judgment comes it will be total and final. Nothing will be left to carry on the struggle. As Obadiah pointed out, if robbers had visited they would not have taken everything; if grape-gatherers had been at work they would not have picked all the grapes. But in judgment the search will be thorough and all hidden things revealed. Those that consider themselves wise and, therefore, safe, will be destroyed; the mighty, though confident in themselves, will be dismayed. In the end, everyone in Mount Esau, trusting in themselves and their own cleverness and strength, will be cut off in the slaughter of the judgment. (vv 5-9)

Notice also that the Edomite attitude is against all that is from God. In true Esau form it asks, “What shall it profit me?” Even so today, flowing from this rejection of God, so we see too a rejection of the standards God has given in His word. Under attack today, even now being cast aside, are the Biblical principles relating to sexual relationships, marriage, how children should be raised, the sanctity of life and so on. There seems to be a mental blindness to the correlation between these attitudes, now widely embraced, and the massive increase in sexually transmitted diseases, broken homes and incomplete families, and problems with behaviour in schools and on the streets. That is just the start. The Christian voice is raised against such trends but, little by little, is being marginalised. Worse will come. Edom’s attitudes began with a passive unfriendliness and animosity; it ended with aggressive, cruel violence. In the past, Christian standards were expected in our society; today, Christians are tolerated while the sure Christian standards are being dismantled piece by piece and generally ignored; in the end there will be aggression and cruelty.

Judgment on the Nations

The godless nations of today are just like Edom – lifted up in arrogant pride and rejecting God. Thus the pronounced judgment of God upon Edom will extend to all the nations (the heathen). God’s judgment is always just and He will judge the world in righteousness (Acts 17 v 31). God’s justice is expressed concisely: ***“As you have done, it shall be done unto you.”***

They had been profane, usurping God’s place, ***“drinking upon His holy mountain.”*** God’s people, on the other hand, will know deliverance and salvation. The house of Jacob (all Israel) shall possess their possessions. This is the certain assurance that the people of God have – ***“...an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fades not away, reserved in heaven...”*** (1 Peter 1 v 4). As we live for the Lord now, we are laying up treasure in heaven and one day we shall possess our possessions.

The people of God are also involved in the judgment of the house of Esau. The house of Jacob shall be the fire and the house of Esau the stubble. (v18) Nothing of the pride of man and the haughtiness of spirit will be allowed to survive, for God must be all and in all. Those who were dispossessed, those who were held captive will know a great release and restoration of all that was taken from them. (vv19 & 20)

“But upon Mount Zion shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness... And saviours shall come up on Mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be the Lord’s” (Obadiah vv 17 & 21). Jesus is the Messiah, the Saviour, Who, as we read in Zechariah, in the end will deliver His people from all the oppression of the enemy. But here it refers to saviours or deliverers. When Jesus comes, as revealed in Revelation 19, He will be accompanied by the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen. Revelation 19 v 18 indicates that the fine linen is the righteousness of saints, those who now, washed in the blood of the Lamb, sit together with Christ in heavenly places. The heavenly Mount Zion is where we now are, as Hebrews 12 v 22 assures us. Jude v 14, I Thessalonians 3 v 13 and Zechariah 14 v 5 all prophesy that, when the Lord comes, He will come with all (ten thousands) of His saints. These are the Lord’s people who were caught up to meet Him in the air at the first stage (The Rapture) of His second coming. These, I believe, are the deliverers on Mount Zion. And the kingdom shall be the Lord’s.

“And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever.” (Revelation 11 v 15)