

SESSION #36

OBADIAH

1. Setting

We are now going to move backward in time to pick up two unrelated Minor Prophets with unique messages. First of all, Obadiah. You can see on the timeline chart that he may have lived around 830 BC, contemporary with Elisha, although we can't be sure because very little is known about this prophet.

2. Message Focus

What we do know about Obadiah is the focus of his message. It's very clear: a message from God directed at the nation of Edom, southeast of Judah in a desert area.

It's a short book, just one chapter, but containing a very powerful message of judgment against the people of Edom, primarily because of their pride. Edom is the only neighboring nation out of all those nations surrounding Israel and Judah for which there is no promise of mercy from God at all due to the behavior and attitude of these people.

Edom has an interesting background and we need to pick it up if we're going to understand the message God had for them through Obadiah. The Edomites began with their ancestor Esau, the twin brother of Jacob. Genesis 25:30 tells us that his name was also Edom, meaning "red", because he sold his birthright for a bowl of red bean stew. And eventually, his descendants – the Edomite people – lived in dwellings built into red rock.

Even now, one of the famous tourist sites in the country of Jordan is the ancient Edomite city of Petra, or Sela, which was their capital city. It was a city entirely built into the rock walls of a desert canyon. And because of their location it was a very easy city to defend. There was only one way into Petra, a very narrow break in this canyon wall. So it was possible to defend the whole city with just a handful of soldiers positioned in this

narrow passageway. This fostered a spirit of independence among these people, a trait which went all the back to their ancestor Esau.

There are no archaeological records among the Edomites of any dependence on any god whatsoever. The lack of any god in their culture is most unusual in global societies. Why didn't they have any gods? They didn't need any gods. They thought they were strong enough, powerful enough, and independent enough to the point of not needing any god.

Not only that, but they hated their brother nation, Israel, whose ancestor of course was the twin brother, Jacob. The Edomites hated Israel all the way from Moses to Malachi. They refused Moses the right to go through their country with his people after they left Egypt and were on their way to the Promised Land. Even though Moses assured them that they would not take any of their goods and would pass through without disturbing Edom at all, the Edomites put up a big sign saying: *"Stop! You can't come through here. We don't like you. We hate you!"*

And now, apparently just prior to God's message being given to Obadiah, some desert tribes had gone into Jerusalem and plundered it. When the Edomites heard about this, they saw a good opportunity for them to do something bad against their hated brother nation of Israel. So they came in after those desert tribes had done their worst and cleaned out the city like a bunch of hyenas. That was an indication of the degree of hatred the Edomites had for God and for God's people, Israel.

3. Title and Key Verse

God's message to the Edomites through Obadiah was a two-part message: *"A Rock that Fails but...ah! a Kingdom that Endures."* These people who lived in the 'rock city' thought their kingdom would live forever and Israel would die out quickly. God said, *"No, it's the other way around. You are the rock that fails; Israel is the kingdom which will endure."*

They had practiced lots of treachery against Judah but against other people as well. Consequently, poetic justice would be dealt to them by God: they themselves would be subject to treachery and robbery and all kinds of trouble.

The key verse could be verse 15: *“For the day of the LORD upon all the nations is near; As you have done, it shall be done to you.”*

4. Structure

Obadiah describes the destruction of Edom in the first 16 verses. It is a picture of the growth of pride in the life of any people. The Edomites were a proud group of people indeed. Notice the description especially in verses 11 – 14, how they gloated and rejoiced over Judah in the day of their calamity. The destruction of Edom is determined by God.

But on the other hand, the salvation of Israel is absolutely certain, verses 17 – 21. *“The house of Jacob shall be a fire...but the house of Esau shall be stubble.”* God promises that Edom will be destroyed but God’s Kingdom will endure forever.

This two-part, one chapter, punchy prophecy by Obadiah focuses not only on the immediate situation of Edom and of Jerusalem/Judah. Yes, he’s going to begin the negative part of his judgment theme by looking at the nation of Edom. But then he moves from the particular, the judgment of Edom, to the general: universal judgment. Edom’s judgment is at the microcosmic level.

And like many of the prophets, Obadiah shows the macro picture of global judgment stated in verse 15. The Day of the Lord will come not just on Edom but on all the nations of the world. That’s the judgment aspect of his prophecy: Edom, but then the whole world.

There is also a positive element to his prophecy, the restoration of Israel, the fact that God’s kingdom, based on Israel, will endure forever because the King will come from this nation and will establish His global Kingdom at the end of time. The final phrase of this little book says, *“And the kingdom shall be the Lord’s”* ...looking forward to that ultimate Kingdom of God.

5. Esau/Edom as a Type Picture

Before we move on to the next book, let’s take another moment to reflect on Edom’s forefather, Esau. Throughout Scripture, Esau and Edom are pictures of people who are

anti-God, hating God, hating God's principles, hating God's people. They are always against God.

King Herod, in the NT, the man who tried to kill all the baby boys in the area of Bethlehem, was an Edomite. No wonder he hated God and God's Messiah to the point of trying to kill him at birth.

However, Edom and Esau are also representative of something much closer to home: our old fleshly Adam-nature. It is arrogant, defiant, proud and hating God and spiritual things. Like Esau, our old nature despises the birthright (our hope of heavenly glory) just for momentary gratification. Our old, fleshly nature is an Edomite.

But Romans chapter 6 tells us that we are "*dead to sin but alive to God*". That's what Jesus did for us. "*Sin can't tell you how to live. After all, you're not living under that old tyranny any longer. You're living in the freedom of God*" (according to Romans 6:14, in The Message version). Yes, our old nature is like an Edomite; it's against God and His principles.

But the good news is that we have God's life resident in our lives by the indwelling of His own powerful Holy Spirit. We don't have to give in to the tyranny of Self, that Edom-Esau in our spiritual walk. God has made victory possible!

Our next session takes us to one of the most disturbing books of the Old Testament, the book of Joel.
