3-3-19

Obadiah 1-21

The prophet Obadiah is in the Bible among the books of the twelve minor prophets. They are called minor prophets simply because their writings weren’t as long as the writings of the major prophets. What they wrote was every bit as important. All their words are the word of God, spoken by inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

The prophet Obadiah had a prophecy that was specifically about the nation of Edom. Edom was situated south-east of the Dead Sea. Edom and Israel were at odds with each other from clear back in Genesis 25:22. If you recall, Abraham and Sarah had their son of promise; Isaac. Isaac married a woman named Rebecca. Rebecca only became pregnant once, but it was apparently an uncomfortable pregnancy.

Genesis 25:22

But the children struggled together within her; and she said, “If it is so, why then am I *this way*?” So she went to inquire of the Lord.

That was a smart move to go and inquire of the LORD. He gave her an answer.

Genesis 25:23

The Lord said to her,

“Two nations are in your womb;  
And two peoples will be separated from your body;  
And one people shall be stronger than the other;  
And the older shall serve the younger.”

When the twin boys were born, Esau was born first but his younger brother, Jacob, came out clinging to his heel. These two boys did indeed begin two nations. Jacob continued the line of his fathers Isaac and Abraham and produced the nation of Israel. Esau also fathered many sons and a nation came from him; Edom.

We can see from what God told Rebecca that things would not go well between them. First, they would be separated; there would be no unity between them. Secondly, one would be stronger than the other so, there would not be equality. Probably Esau was physically stronger than Jacob but not by much. As we read Genesis, we find that Jacob was a very strong man. The LORD’s word referred to the nations of Israel and Edom. Although there was some back and forth, usually Israel was the stronger nation. Thirdly, the older would serve the younger. This was not normal, usually the elder son had the authority; this would certainly be a sore point between them. However, this shows the sovereignty of God; He chooses how He wants things to be.

As we read the Biblical account, we learn the Esau, and more particularly the nation he fathered, developed an intense hatred for Jacob and for Israel. Although Edom came under Israelite control at times, Edom would rise up against Israel any time it got the chance.

We may look at some of the things that Jacob did to Esau and that Israel did to Edom and understand why Edom didn’t like Israel. But the hatred was unreasonable; Israel would subject Edom, but Edom wanted Israel’s destruction and rejoiced at their hardships. The even more basic problem was Edom’s rejection of God and His will. God had made it clear that Jacob/Israel had been chosen. Instead of submission to God, they hardened their hearts and remained rebellious.

We don’t know when Obadiah was given this prophecy, but in it, he tells of Edom’s sins; he lets it be known that Edom will be completely annihilated; and that in spite of Edom’s desire, Israel will survive and continue to be God’s people. Now, Israel does remain God’s chosen people to whom has been added the church made up of all nations. Additionally, Edom is no more. There may be people living now who have Edomite blood somewhere in their ancestry; but the nation is gone, there is not even a small group of people or town that can claim descent from Esau.

In verse 1 of Obadiah’s book, the LORD lets it be known that Edom’s destruction will come about primarily by other nations, although we see later that Israel will play a part in the end of her adversary. Edom was subdued by other nations during the 500’s and 400’s. This was during the time that Israel was very weak; when Jerusalem was destroyed by Babylon, during their captivity, and when they came back and started to rebuild. The last nation to attack and finally run them out was the Nabataeans. The Nabataeans were of Arabic descent which would be from Abraham’s son, Ishmael. Edom relocated into the Negev, which is the southland of Judah.

Obadiah tells Edom that its problem is that it is arrogant, this is in verse 3. When someone is arrogant, they can’t see reality, and so, Obadiah tells them that the arrogance of their heart has deceived them. They have fooled themselves; they have believed in several things they think will keep them safe.

They lived in a natural rock fortress and carved their dwelling out of the cliffs. The place is beautiful and is currently called Petra. They controlled important trade routes. In their eyes, they were a bigger nation than they really were; so, in verse 2, God tells them that He will make them small and despised.

Their dwelling place of Petra was enclosed almost completely by high cliffs; there was only one narrow entry way. It is amazing how high in the cliffs they carved out places to live. They imagined themselves to be completely safe within these cliffs and we see that they asked in their hearts “Who will bring me down to earth?” This is quite a challenge. Unfortunately for them, the LORD answers and tells them “I will.”

Edom depended on money, their wealth was their strong fortress. Because of the trading routes that ran through the nation, they were able to impose tariffs. In verses 5 and 6, the LORD lets them know they’re money will be gone. Normally thieves would only take what they could use or carry. Even those who gathered grapes would leave some behind. But the nation of Edom will be ransacked; even what they have hidden will be found. They will be left with nothing.

Edom depended on their neighbors and believed they were safe. Verse 7 demonstrates that those nations who were at peace with Edom; those with whom they had agreements; even those nations they considered friends, would turn against them and drive them out of their land.

Edom contained wise men. Along with money, the trading routs brought information and knowledge from other parts of the world. But wisdom comes from the LORD and in verse 8 He promises to confound their wisdom and they will lose their understanding.

The bloodline of Esau were brave and strong fighters. Edom had its army and they depended on it. In verse 9, we see that the mighty men will be *dismayed*. That is not what you want your army to be. But God can intervein and cause confusion among men. Their army will be destroyed.

We have covered six things the nation of Edom put their faith in, depended on. Notice that God is absent from their list. They were deceived by all their worldly success. God will show them that He is far more powerful than all that they put their faith in.

In verses 10 through 14, God lists what Edom has done to their brother, Israel. The things listed ought not to be done at all, let alone to a brother. When reading these verses, we can think primarily of Jerusalem’s final destruction by king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Not only did Edom offer no assistance, they celebrated when Jerusalem and its people were conquered. They were happy to see the misfortune of Israel. God tells them that they were just as guilty as Babylon.

Recall in Mathew chapter 5 where Jesus tells us that even thinking on things in our heart such as anger or lust is the same as committing murder or adultery. Here the glee of the Edomites is the same as if they had attacked their brother themselves. Additionally, they were happy to enter Judah and loot whatever was left, taking from whoever remained what little they had. Finally, they stood at crossroads and waited for any who may have escaped the attack. These refugees from Judah and Jerusalem, who had escaped with their lives, the Edomites captured and either killed or returned them to the Babylonians.

Starting in verse 17, Obadiah tells Edom that regardless of all their efforts, Israel will survive; God will keep a remnant. Edom, however, will not last. Back in verses 1 and 2, we saw how other nations would drive Edom out of their home and history shows us that happened. Now we see that God will use Israel to finish the job; they will be as fire, Edom will be as stubble.

This was fulfilled during the 400 years of Biblical silence between the prophet Malachi and the arrival of John the Baptist. During this time the Maccabean revolt took place and Judah was led by the Hasmonaean dynasty. The Edomites had been pushed out of their land and had taken up residence in the Negev, the southland of Judah. The Hasmonaean’s led the Israelite army south to retake the land of the Negev. They were successful in completely subjugating the Edomites. They showed mercy to survivors by allowing them to accept Judaism and were eventually absorbed into Jewish culture. The Herod’s that we read about in the New Testament were descendants of Esau. The Edomite distinction eventually disappeared and is no longer with us; Just as Obadiah prophesied.

While all this is interesting, what is here for us now, what is here for us today? The book of Obadiah and the story of the Edomites, is a foreshadowing. It is a small, contained, acting out of the overall plan of God for the whole world. In this short book of 21 verses, we see the acting out of the future of the human-race.

Notice that the term “day of the LORD” shows up in verse 15. That phrase in the Bible always indicates the end. It may be the end of something in particular, but it always points to the final point in history where Jesus establishes His Kingdom. Also, the day of the LORD indicates a period of time. It may be a 24-hour day; usually it is a much longer time. We see this in Obadiah; the end of the Edomites came, it just took some time.

In the first line of verse 15, the message of Obadiah veers away from Edom for just a moment, and mentions all the nations. This is an indication that we can apply what is happening here to more than just Edom; that we have a picture of the ultimate day of the LORD.

As we know, many nations currently stand against Israel. Their hatred of Israel is unreasonable, yet they remain committed to its destruction. Here in Obadiah we see what is going to happen in regard to all these nations: Israel will be protected by God such that the people will survive and the nations that are against Israel will be destroyed. Whatever these nations do to Israel will come back on their own heads.

The same can be said of the church, of Christians. We are God’s people and we are hated by the world. The world would like to be rid of us.

It is important to notice that God allowed Edom to exist and even to cause Israel all the grief that it did. God has His reasons for this, which we will look at shortly, but we can actually gain comfort from what we read. Again, Edom is a small acting out of the world and God’s plan is demonstrated. Look at what Edom depended on: a puffed-up view of themselves, their own fortifications, money, friends, counselors wise in worldly ways, their army. Sounds familiar. These are the things the world depends on and when they are depended on, they bring about arrogance.

We see this arrogance with those in power who not only support killing unborn children, but now stand at the cross-roads, waiting to kill the infants who somehow survive an abortion attempt. We see those with money who use it to push their own ideas with no concern for other human-beings who might be harmed. We see nations using their armies to try to wipe out entire people groups. We see coalitions forming for no other reason than greed and to subject others to their whims; these coalitions can be nations or individuals.

We look at these things, see them for the evil that they are, and ask God why He allows it. He allows these things for the same reasons He allowed the Edomites. But we also know, that these will be dealt with in the day of the LORD; they will face God’s wrath and eternal destruction.

We may not understand all the reasons God allows Edomites in the world, but we know some. One reason is to bring about suffering. God’s people must suffer. The Israelites must suffer judgement. Throughout their history they have been unfaithful to God. They have rebelled against Him and they have rejected God’s Messiah. He allows suffering so they might turn back to Him, because He is faithful. Christians also suffer; but we suffer for the glory of God and as a testimony to Jesus Christ.

We can take comfort that God allows the Edomites to exist; that their presence is all part of God’s plan. We are called to pray for them, knowing that destruction awaits those who do not repent and turn to Christ. And we must be careful not to make the same mistake they make: Do not gloat over their impending destruction; we ourselves are only saved by grace and by no merit of our own.

Prayer

Oh Lord God, evil exists, not because You desire it that way, but that by it Your purposes may be accomplished and You may be glorified. Thank You for this picture You have given us by Your prophet Obadiah. By it we see that You are well aware that evil exists, but that You will use it for Your own purposes, and then it will face ultimate destruction.

We lift up to You all those we know or know of who practice these things. We pray for their salvation. We freely admit our own guilt; if not for Your grace, we would be no different than they. We praise You for Your mercy, LORD, for You delay their destruction in the event that they might turn to You and be saved.

We pray for Your people Israel, we pray for Your church. May the suffering we endure bring about Your purposes. Bring us closer to You, sanctify us, witness to Christ, and bring You glory.

We pray these things in the name of Jesus our Lord and King

Amen