

THE HOUSE OF ESAU

A Study of Obadiah

Study #7

How Esau Will Be Ransacked (*Obadiah 5-9*)

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. *Psalms 137:7* = Although Obadiah was written about 260 years before the Babylonian invasion, the Edomites still opposed Judah *during* that later invasion. Of course, what Edom didn't know was that they themselves were shortly to be a target of Nebuchadnezzar as well. At any rate, the psalmist here writes a remembrance of that horrific, traumatizing event. And in *verse 7*, he prays fervently for the Lord to **remember** Edom's treachery.
- B. *Lamentations 4:21-22* = At the end of his fourth lament regarding that Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem, Jeremiah the prophet predicts judgment for Edom as well.
- C. *Ezekiel 35:1-15* = Here, the prophet Ezekiel prophesies a destruction and devastation against Edom that will be total and complete. He makes it plain that the reason for such destruction is the enmity that Edom expresses against its brother nation, Israel (more on that next week).
- D. *Malachi 1:1-5* = The last of the Old Testament writing prophets, Malachi, made a statement of destruction coming against Edom as well, but note that he assigns that destruction as the sovereign choice of a Sovereign God.
- E. *Genesis 25:21-26* = The account of the births of Jacob and Esau, including the prophetic announcement of Israel's subjugation over Edom. We'll explore these issues in great detail next week! For now, just notice them so they are in your mind.
- F. *Romans 9:10-13* = Note that God's sovereign election was at work in this situation, and although He used Edom's sin and rebellion to accomplish His purpose, there is the ever-present balance between God's sovereignty and man's accountability.

II. REVIEW/PREVIEW

- A. *Obadiah 2-4* = In the passage we examined last week, we noted God's strong opposition to the national pride and arrogance of Edom. Their arrogant hearts had deceived them into thinking they were invincible and untouchable. And so God gave them a heavy dose of reality, a stern wake-up call. Their question was, "**Who will...**" His answer was, "**I will...**" His promise to Edom was of destruction and desolation. Tonight, we are going to see the awesome power of God described in the totality of the destruction He is about to execute upon Edom. The remainder of this section will essentially break itself into three parts, which are comparable in content to the denouncement of human pride found in *Jeremiah*:
- B. *Jeremiah 9:23-26* = In pronouncing judgment on the nations surrounding Judah (including Edom, see *9:26*), Jeremiah denounces human pride, and specifically, in three areas: human *wisdom*, human *might* and human *wealth*. In a national sense, this indicates pride in regard to three aspects: **1.** the ability of a nation to gather intelligence as a tactical defense; **2.** the ability of a nation to protect itself through military strength and diplomatic prowess; and, **3.** the ability of a nation to prosper through economic development by means of taxation and international trade.
- C. *Obadiah 5-9* = And so this section of Obadiah establishes God's intent to ruin Edom in all three of these areas:
 - 1. *Obadiah 5-6* = In these verses, God promises to destroy the *wealth* of Edom.
 - 2. *Obadiah 7-8* = In these verses, God promises to use her allies against her, by nullifying Edom's intelligence-gathering ability so that she will not even see it coming.
 - 3. *Obadiah 9* = And in this final verse, God promises to defeat Edom's military might as well.

III. TEXT: OBADIAH 5-9

- A. *verse 5* = Yahweh asks two rhetorical, hypothetical questions, separated by an exclamation of horror and sadness from the mouth of the prophet. These questions are meant to pose a hypothetical contrast against the coming reality. Merely human effort to rob, steal or gather would result in only a partial loss of property. There would be something left when the thieves or gatherers were finished. By contrast, the conquest against Edom that would be waged by God would result in a total loss of all material wealth.
1. **“If thieves came to you...”** = The first hypothetical question comes in two parts, each set off by the Hebrew conjunction *'im*, meaning “if.” Here is the first: suppose that thieves came to you. The idea here is that *thieves*, who operate in secrecy and have no regard for the sanctity of other people’s property, might at some point enter your dwelling places. The mention of **thieves** and **robbers** makes it clear here that it is material wealth which forms the subject of this first pronouncement.
 2. **“...if robbers by night...”** = This is the second half of the first hypothetical question, and it is essentially a parallel statement. There is a subtle difference, however, in that the first word used, **thieves**, denotes a sneaky, secret home invasion. Here, the word translated **robbers** is the Hebrew word *sôq̄dê* and is a strong, sharp word that literally means a *devastator*. The word has the flavor of someone who breaks in violently under the cover of night, takes what he wants and destroys the rest. And so the first part of the rhetorical statement progresses from relatively mild in scope to brutal and destructive vandalization. The effect is this: if something bad happened...no, if something even *worse* than bad happened, what is actually coming will be even worse than *that!*
 3. **“...O how you will be ruined!”** = As Yahweh begins to unfold, through the vision given to Obadiah, the totality of Edom’s destruction, the prophet cannot restrain himself. He exclaims with great sorrow, “How awful this will be!” Many commentators suggest that Obadiah is being ironic, satirical or sarcastic here. But I see nothing in the text to suggest a biting, catty tone in the prophet’s exclamation. A natural reading of the text instead seems to suggest that as the totality of Edom’s coming devastation was revealed to Obadiah, the prophet was overwhelmed with emotion and cried out in horror and sorrow. The word translated **ruined** is another sharp Hebrew word that means “to be silenced,” or more literally, “to be taken out of existence.” It is possible that Obadiah begins to see here that the entirety of the population of Edom, including relatively innocent women and children, would be annihilated on account of the actions of the few who made ungodly decisions for the nation. Any correlation in modern times?
 4. **“...would they not steal *only* until they had enough?”** = And here is the completion of the first rhetorical, hypothetical thought. No matter how thorough a robber might be, there was a limit to what he could carry off. The Hebrew phrase renders literally, “would they not steal their sufficiency?” Once the thieves had all they needed, all they valued, or all they could carry, they would leave the rest behind and the owner would still have possession of the remainder.
 5. **“If grape gatherers came to you...”** = In an exactly parallel construction, Yahweh offers the second hypothetical illustration. What if harvesters came to the vineyards of Edom? This is an interesting shift, isn’t it? The first illustration involved **thieves** and **robbers**, those who act illegally to usurp possession of that which does not belong to them. In the second illustration, by contrast, those involved are legally sanctioned to do their work...even *paid* for the work by those for whom they labor! The picture that God is painting is that those coming would do harm, on the one hand (from Edom’s perspective), and yet be doing exactly what they were hired to do (from God’s perspective).
 6. **“...would they not leave some gleanings?”** = No matter how thorough a harvester did his work, some grapes would inevitably be left in the vineyard. Perhaps they would be left on the vine, because the gatherer missed them, or intentionally left them (either because they were not fit to be picked yet, or in deference to the poor who might come behind the harvesters). Or perhaps they would be left on the ground, having fallen out of the basket or escaped from the gatherer’s hand to be lost within the foliage and deemed irretrievable. Whatever the reason, one thing was sure. After a good picking, there were still grapes left in the vineyard.
- B. *verse 6* = The prophet utters another statement of astonishment and shock, as Yahweh describes, through his mouth, the totality of Edom’s financial and economic ruin.

1. **“O how Esau will be ransacked...”** = Again, Obadiah cries out with the common Hebrew exclamation of agony and sorrow, *’èk*. **Esau**, the brother nation of Israel, was about to be wiped out of existence. **Ransacked** translates the Hebrew *nèhp’sù* which is only used rarely in the Old Testament (23 times, to be exact). It is a forceful word, describing the idea of hunting someone down no matter where he runs to hide.
 - a. *Amos 9:2-3* = The prophet Amos describes God’s destructive pursuit of rebellious Israel using the same word (see *9:3*, **search them out**). We can see that the word has the flavor of hunting to the very edges of creation to find the object of one’s wrath, in order to bring about judgment.
 2. **“...and his hidden treasures searched out!”** = The Hebrew word translated **hidden treasures** is a *hapax legomenon*, used only here in the entire Old Testament. Although this sometimes makes words hard to analyze or translate, its connection with the word translated **searched out** makes its meaning clear. Edom’s cities, nestled within the stark and foreboding rock formations of its terrain, offered a plethora of hiding places that were all but undetectable and inaccessible. And yet even these would be searched out, uncovered and despoiled. Edom’s financial and material wealth would thus be reduced to nothing, and its economic prosperity would be obliterated.
- C. *verse 7* = How could such a prosperous, securely-situated nation be demolished so completely? *Verse 1* told us that God had already sent out an angelic envoy to incite the surrounding nations against Edom. Now the exact nature of the betrayal and treachery involved come to light with full force. God was not going to use hostile nations, primarily. Rather, he would use those upon whom Edom had come to rely for protection and friendship. Three groups will be used to accomplish God’s judgment.
1. **“All the men allied with you...”** = Here is the first group: literally, “all the men of your covenant.” In our own modern age, a man’s word often means very little. But in these ancient contexts, a covenant was ratified with blood, through the sacrifice of animals (the Hebrew phrase is “to cut a covenant;” e.g. *Genesis 15:7-18*). Such a covenant was a binding contract, and the penalty for breaking it was death. And Edom had entered into covenant with a number of her neighbors. They were her allies, and had covenanted to protect her against harm.
 2. **“...will send you forth to the border...”** = Instead of offering the promised protection, these covenantal allies will forcefully expel Edom from her own land, forcing her to leave her own borders. The word **send forth** is a dynamic word that is sometimes translated *weapon* or *spear*. In other words, Edom’s allies would thrust her from out of her land with the force of a projectile weapon unleashed from the hand of a warrior.
 3. **“...and the men at peace with you...”** = The second group were those surrounding nations with which Edom had no conflicts. Though she had not necessarily entered into covenant with these, she enjoyed mutual peace with them. They existed in harmony with, and mutual respect of, one another.
 4. **“...will deceive you and overpower you...”** = This is the second time in the paragraph that this Hebrew word *nš*’ (**deceive[d]**) is used. In our last study, we saw in *verse 3* that the Edomites had been **deceived** by their own arrogant hearts. One of the heart’s great deceptions is that of *peace*, when in fact there is no peace. Edom was **deceived** by her own arrogance, into believing that none of her neighbors would *dare* attack her. After all, she was invincible! Who would risk such a foolish attack? And the result of her proud blindness was that the very nations with whom she believed she was at peace would suddenly rise up and **overpower** her.
 5. **“...they who eat your bread...”** = Easily the most picturesque phrase used in the passage, it is literally, “your bread will set an ambush for you.” And with this arresting visual metaphor, the third group is unveiled. The men within Edom’s borders, with whom she shared close and intimate fellowship, her dearest friends, those who sit at her table and dine with her, sharing in her prosperity and abundance; those very men would act against her.
 6. **“...will set an ambush for you.”** = This Hebrew word, *māzôr*’ is used only here in the Old Testament. It derives from a word that means “to weave or twist.” In that sense, it is a pictorial word expressing the weaving of a net, trap or snare that could be arranged or devised *under* Edom’s feet (the word translated **for** is actually the Hebrew preposition that means “under”).

7. **“(There is no understanding in him.)”** = This phrase, inserted in the NASB as a parenthetical statement, actually flows very fluidly with the following verse, where the same word (*ʾbūnā(h)*) translated **understanding** is used. The pronoun **him** here actually refers back to its antecedent, **ambush**. The phrase does not indicate that Edom would have no understanding *of* it, when it happened. Rather, she would have no understanding *in* the ambush. It would take her completely by surprise. And yet, how is it possible that Edom, renowned for her wise men and her ability to gather intelligence, could be deceived so thoroughly by those she trusted so completely?
- D. *verse 8* = Here Yahweh explains exactly how such deception would be possible. He Himself would destroy their powers of discernment and reason, and bring all of their attempts at intelligence-gathering to nothing.
1. **“Will I not on that day...”** = That is, the future day of destruction that is coming. It is important to note that by the time the prophecy is given, Yahweh has in His sovereignty, already appointed the *very day* of this destruction. He is not making a vague threat, to be fulfilled at some unspecified moment in the fuzzy future. The day is fixed, the destruction planned to the very hour, every gruesome detail divinely designated.
 2. **“...declares the LORD...”** = Owing to the awful nature of the revelation, Obadiah feels compelled to remind the reader Who is speaking. This vengeance is not of Obadiah’s devising. It is the sovereign work of One Who has ownership rights over all the nations, to do with as He pleases, and Who is in covenant relationship with Israel to protect and defend her.
 3. **“...destroy wise men from Edom...”** = The verb translated **destroy** here is in the Hebrew causative stem. The emphasis here is on the hand of Yahweh as it accomplishes His purposes. All of the great and fabled wisdom of Edom would go astray and be lost (this is the literal meaning of the word translated **destroy** here). Her intelligence officers would be able to deliver only confusing cross-messages. God would bring it all to nothing.
 4. **“...and understanding from the mountain of Esau?”** = This is basically an exactly parallel statement with the one before it. But note: this phrase opened at the beginning of the verse, with a Hebrew *interrogative particle*. Yahweh is not merely making a statement. He is asking a question. Of course the obvious implied answer is “Yes,” Yahweh *is* in fact going to do these things. If the answer is so strongly implied and so obvious, why phrase this as a question? The strong sense here is that Yahweh wants the reader to stop what he is doing, and consider the ramifications of what He is about to do. It is good for us to stop and consider God’s promises for the future...whether they are for good and prosperity, or whether they are for evil and destruction. Judah failed to do so, with disastrous consequences.
 - a. *Lamentations 1:9* = Jeremiah expresses great sorrow that Judah fell *astoundingly* because she had failed to consider her future. How could she have been expected to know of her future? Because God had warned her repeatedly of coming judgment!
 5. **“...the mountain of Esau...”** = This is a reference to the mountainous region occupied by Edom. The phrase is used four times in Obadiah’s prophecy (cf. 9, 19, 21).
- E. *verse 9* = So far Yahweh has described the destruction of Edom’s economic prosperity, its diplomatic relationships, and its intelligence-gathering ability. Now, in the final statement of the totality of Edom’s annihilation, Yahweh promises to overcome Edom’s military might as well.
1. **“Then your mighty men will be dismayed...”** = The word translated **dismayed** here means to be shattered and terrified. Having lost its intelligence capabilities, the military might of Edom will flail like a broken arm, having neither clear strategy nor decisive plan of action. The result will be a shattered military, terrorized, broken beyond repair by the invading forces and entirely demoralized.
 2. **“...O Teman...”** = This city, named for Esau’s grandson (see *Genesis 36:9-11*), was a key fortified military city in the north of Edom’s territory. It was very possibly a training ground for Edom’s military men, which could explain its connection in this passage to Edom’s **mighty men**. At any rate, the name of the city is used here as a designation for the nation as a whole.
 3. **“...so that everyone may be cut off from the mountain of Esau by slaughter.”** = These two words, translated **cut off** and **slaughter**, are ferocious, vicious Hebrew verbs. **Cut off** is a word that literally means to be *exterminated* like pests. It denotes not only execution of life, but an execution that arises

from disdain and disregard for the sanctity of another's value as a living thing. The word **slaughter** is from a word that literally means to *murder brutally*. These terms, piled up as they are, force us to the inescapable reality of God's merciless wrath and vengeance on His enemies. And with these stunningly awful, frightening pictures to close the paragraph, we are left almost breathless in view of God's righteous wrath, demonstrated in systematic extermination of the proud people of Edom.

Is there anything we can learn from this?

IV. CONCLUSION

- A. *Luke 12:1-5* = Jesus states so very clearly in this passage that we ought to live our lives in a certain kind of fear. Though some wave this idea away by assigning our *fear* of God to the realm of *reverence* or *respect*, that is absolutely not the word that Jesus uses here. Three times He uses the word *phobos*, from which we derive the English word "phobia." The word denotes an intense dread or terror of a thing, sometimes even to the point of irrationality. But in this case, we are drawn inexorably to the truth that God, our God, is a *fearsome* Entity, mighty and awesome in His power and wrath. He is not One with whom we may trifle and escape unscathed.
- B. *Luke 12:6-7* = And yet, in the same breath as it were, Jesus relates the precious truth of our value to this fearsome God. He counts even the hairs of our head (easier in some cases than in others). And so those oppose to Him ought to be literally quaking in their boots. But remember that Obadiah was written *concerning* Edom, but *to* Judah. It was not primarily a warning to the enemy, but a reassuring reminder of covenant love to Yahweh's chosen people. This fearsome God, when stirred up against our enemies, is the single and only means for rescue that we have. But in His awesome, unparalleled power, He is the only rescue we need. As Paul said, "If God *is* for us, who *is* against us," (*Romans 8:31*). Do you know Him?

V. PRAYER