

The Jacobs and The Esaus

Obadiah

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Note: The text below was prepared for oral delivery rather than for publication in print. As such, be aware that sentence fragments are intentionally used and that this document has not been edited to correct the errors in grammar, sentence structure, etc.

I. Introduction:

- A. In this holiday season when many who profess to be of the Christian faith celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, you might find it odd that I've chosen to deliver a message from the Old Testament book of Obadiah. During this time of year, manger scenes and Christmas cards often invoke quaint visions of a little baby born in a manger. But our knowledge of this One born some 2000 years ago needs to go beyond the warm and fuzzy sense many get from that image of His birth.
- B. Now every Sunday at this church we preach what some might call "a Christmas sermon" because we preach the Gospel here – the good news concerning how God saves sinners in and by the Lord Jesus Christ. As Paul put it, we preach "Christ and Him crucified," meaning His Person and that which he accomplished by His doing and dying on the cross.
- C. Recall the story of how the resurrected Christ appeared and conversed with others on the road to Emmaus. And as they neared the village, we're told in Luke 24:27 that "***...beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.***" So, I hope to preach from the book of Obadiah the story for this and every season – the story of eternal salvation fully accomplished by the Person and finished work of Christ.
- D. Today we will consider from the book of Obadiah 2 historical families and their descendants, "The Jacobs and The Esaus," as I have so titled today's message. And if we're to see Christ from Obadiah it's imperative that we perceive how these 2 historical families are representative of the only 2 spiritual families that exist. Physically, I'm not of Jewish descent and so not physically related to either Jacob or Esau. But I want you to see that spiritually speaking, we all either belong to the eternally blessed house of Jacob (what the Bible calls the "Israel of God") or else we belong to the eternally condemned house of Esau.
- E. Now this short, 1-chapter book of Obadiah foretells the destruction of the nation Edom. Edom was an enemy of Israel and was comprised of the descendants of Esau. Jacob and Esau were twin brothers and at the time of Obadiah's prophecy the hostility that had begun between these two twins continued to be reflected in their descendants, the nations Edom and Israel.

F. Much of Obadiah is about God's wrath against Edom. I know that on the surface this doesn't sound like a very cheerful theme for this season of the year. But bear with me for there is much to be cheerful over as the book concludes by relating to us the good news concerning the sure and certain eternal salvation for "spiritual Israel" – not the physical Jewish nation, temporarily chosen by God under the Old Covenant, but those who are spiritually related to Jacob, a chosen people unto eternal salvation from among all nationalities, typified by that chosen physical nation. And while most folks don't want to hear about God's hatred for the house of Esau, I hope to show you the importance of gaining an understanding of what God's hatred of the family of Esau is all about because apart from that, we cannot comprehend the love of God for the spiritual family of Jacob. Verse 1 of Obadiah begins...

II. Verses 1-2: *The vision* <or prophecy> *of Obadiah. Thus saith the Lord GOD concerning Edom;* <Now many would prefer to not dwell on what follows – a prophecy of God's just wrath against Edom, the house of Esau. But God has put it here for a reason. Our needs are not met by what you or I naturally prefer or even choose to hear. We need to hear what God has to say and so we're compelled to preach just as Obadiah prophesied, "Thus saith the Lord God." Obadiah continues saying...> *We have heard a rumour* <that simply means a report> *from the LORD, and an ambassador* <Obadiah referring to himself> *is sent among the heathen, Arise ye, and let us rise up against her in battle.* ²*Behold, I have made thee small among the heathen: thou art greatly despised.* He's telling Edom, the house of Esau, that they are hated.

A. Now before we proceed, we need to consider some background concerning these 2 families, the Jacobs and the Esaus. Esau was the slightly older twin son of Isaac and Rebecca. We're told that as the twins were delivered, Jacob the younger one was clinging to the heel of his older brother Esau. As their father Isaac lay on his death bed, Jacob deceptively gained the birthright that was supposed to go to the eldest son – in this case Esau, with Esau's consent. Esau, showing no value for that which the birthright represented, sold his birthright to his brother Jacob for a bowl of soup. He didn't need the material wealth associated with it but the Jewish birthright consisted of more than a material inheritance. The birthright also represented the responsibility that was to be passed along to the eldest son to be the spiritual leader of the family. Esau showed contempt and no regard for that position, for the things of God as reflected in his selling of the birthright to Jacob for a bowl of soup. And you can read how thereafter they became enemies.

B. Now that animosity exists even today among the spiritual families of Jacob and Esau. And that stems from "what saith the Lord" concerning these 2 spiritual families. So before we proceed in Obadiah, let's look at God's commentary on Jacob and Esau from Romans 9, beginning in verse 11 where we read...

“(For the children <Jacob and Esau> being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;)¹² It was said unto her, <Rebecca> The elder shall serve the younger.¹³ As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.¹⁴ What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid.¹⁵ For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.¹⁶ So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy.” Now this creates division among the Jacobs and the Esaus of this world. In our day, you point out this passage and most so-called ‘Christians’ get upset in their rejection of this clear proclamation from God that salvation is not by their presumed free will but totally a product of God’s sovereign purpose and mercy. The hostility is between those who self-righteously presume they can be saved by something they do or something that proceeds from them (their will or their works) and those who God declares are saved by His free grace in Christ alone, identified in time as they are given faith to embrace salvation God’s way – caused to see their desperate need for salvation by grace in Christ alone.

- C. During this season you won’t hear very much about God hating a people. The world doesn’t want to hear that. Many try to twist the scripture to claim that God’s hatred of Esau was simply an expression of His loving him less than He did Jacob. Others think that God cannot hate because they think his hatred would be sinful, knowing that our hatred towards others is indeed sinful. But God’s love and God’s hatred cannot be compared to our emotional feelings of love and hate. The Bible declares that we all have sinned and come short of the glory of God and that all sin deserves death (Rom. 3:23, 6:23). The scripture teaches us that God is no respecter of persons (Rom. 2:11) and so there is nothing lovely or loveable about any of us sinners if considered separate from Christ. God’s hatred is not like man’s sinful, selfish, and unrighteous hatred toward others. God’s hatred is righteous. It is His justice against sin. His hatred is His righteous indignation against sin.
- D. God must do right. Not only is He a God of love and mercy, but He is holy and just and therefore, sin cannot go unpunished. His just wrath will be dispensed against the sins of every creature that ever lived. Your sins / my sins shall not go unpunished. For the spiritual household of Esau, God’s just wrath shall be manifested in the eternal death of hell and everlasting separation from God – everlasting because as mere sinful creatures, no amount of suffering will ever pay down that which is due unto the injured holy justice of God. But know this: For the spiritual household of Jacob, God’s just wrath must also be dispensed on account of their sins. But for these everlasting objects of God’s love, mercy, and grace, God’s wrath was poured out at Calvary’s cross on their Substitute, the Lord Jesus Christ. Their sins were fully punished there.
- E. Now this is important because unless and until we see that God, being just, must punish all sin, we will not come pleading for mercy in Christ for all of our salvation. The problem lies in our naturally inflated opinions of our own importance and what we think we deserve.

Our natural thoughts are that we do not deserve to be hated, which is reflected in our imagination that there must be something I can do, some choice I can make that will find me in favor with God who surely must love me in return. That's why the natural outcry against God's sovereignty in salvation is "Why, that wouldn't be fair. God would be unrighteous we suppose (as we just read from Romans 9) if God hates the Esaus and loves the Jacobs. But what saith the Lord? He says He'll have mercy on whom He will. "Esau have I hated" – or to put it another way, "My just wrath shall be manifested against Esau for his sins."

- F. Since we're all sinners and therefore deserving of God's wrath, the issue shouldn't be how could God hate us but rather how can a holy God (who cannot commune with sin) love any of us sinners? Well, just as God's hatred, unlike ours, is not emotional, neither is His love. God's love is seen in His purpose to save – in the sovereign mercy shown in Christ. Believers are told this in I John 4:10, "***Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.***" He sent Christ to be the propitiation – the sin-bearing sacrifice that has satisfied God's justice due unto the sins of all those for whom Christ lived and died. So God's love is found in Christ's Person and work of redemption for His people. "Jacob have I loved" or to put that another way, "I will not impute (or charge) Jacob with his sins, having imputed (or charged) them to his Surety, my dear Son, the God-man whose blood alone is of such infinite value to fully redeem – fully pay the debt due unto the holy justice of God for the remission of their sins, once and forever." That's why their glorification in heaven is everlasting. Now with this understanding of God's love and hatred, let's continue in Obadiah, vs 3 where He says to Edom...

III. Verses 3-4: ***The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee, thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high; that saith in his heart, Who shall bring me down to the ground? ⁴Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down, saith the LORD.***

- A. In these 2 verses we see a description of the natural heart and a depiction of the false sense of security that accompanies it. The geographical area of Edom was mountainous and there were rocks and caves in the higher elevations in which they presumed to be physically safe from their enemies. So they thought no one could defeat them saying "Who shall bring us down?" And in verse 4 God answers saying, "I will bring you down."
- B. Spiritually, we are all inclined to exalt ourselves. This describes both those who are religiously indifferent – who figure things somehow will work out for them surely in the end – as well as those who are sincerely religious but yet to have been humbled under the true Gospel message of grace so as to see their utter hopelessness outside of Christ. The only ones who will be ultimately exalted in heavens' glory are exalted by God in Christ. And He brings this to their awareness in time by first humbling them to show them their desperate need for God's mercy and grace in Christ. There's only one cleft of the rock where there is eternal safety and that's in Christ, the solid rock, or as we sing, the "Rock of ages, cleft for me. Let me hide myself in thee." Continuing in verse 5 the complete and total destruction of Edom is foretold as it reads...

IV. Verses 5-6: *If thieves came to thee, if robbers by night, (how art thou cut off!) would they not have stolen till they had enough? if the grapegatherers came to thee, would they not leave some grapes? ⁶How are the things of Esau searched out! how are his hidden things sought up!*

He's telling them that if they were the victim of thieves they would leave somethings behind – perhaps only taking that which they could find and were able to carry with them. But not so for the things of Esau that are thoroughly searched out.

A. And in that we have a picture of how all will be exposed in the day of eternal judgment so as to vindicate God in His righteous judgment. This is foretelling how total and complete the destruction of Edom as a nation would be. And it illustrates how certain and total will be the eternal destruction of those who perish as spiritually dead sinners, without Christ as their Savior and Mediator. God will be vindicated as their sinfulness is exposed – including all the hidden, selfish motives and thoughts that we might effectively hide from others but for which the spiritual house of Esau shall be held fully accountable. And then in verses 7-9 we read of this day of reckoning as it continues...

V. Verses 7-9: *All the men of thy confederacy <their presumed allies> have brought thee even to the border: <as if they would be there to fight with them and defend them> the men that were at peace with thee have deceived thee, and prevailed against thee;*

A. This reminds me of those occasions when we share with a friend or relative the Gospel of God's grace that we preach here and, not being able to refute the scriptures, they go back to check this out with their false preacher – I'm referring to the many who teach and preach that salvation is ultimately conditioned on the sinner's decision, their choice, their response (rather than on Christ alone). And as the Prophet Jeremiah put it (Jer. 6:14), they cry peace to them where there is no ground of peace – saying you're okay, you're at peace with God as they deceive them (typically being deceived themselves – but deceiving them nonetheless), so that they remain confident in their false refuge – in that which they (the sinner) has done to presumably procure their own salvation. But that's Satan's deception and it will prevail against you unless by God's grace you're taught of God and given faith to believe on Christ – in salvation by Christ alone. And the Prophet continues saying ...

B. "...*they that eat thy bread have laid a wound under thee: there is none understanding in him.* <They've taken from you, but they hurt you in their ignorance.> ⁸*Shall I not in that day, saith the LORD, even destroy the wise men out of Edom, and understanding out of the mount of Esau?* <I read where these descendants of Esau were known for their worldly wisdom> ⁹*And thy mighty men, O Teman, shall be dismayed, to the end that every one of the mount of Esau may be cut off by slaughter.* Teman was a part of Edom named after Esau's grandson and was known for its mighty warriors – but the wisdom and might of man is no match for the just judgment of almighty God.

C. From a spiritual standpoint, this is typical of those who are highly esteemed among men as religiously wise, spiritual warriors but those who will be dismayed at their final end – much like those preachers Christ wrote of in Matthew 7 who approached the judgment, confident in their wonderful works (presumably performed for the Lord) only to hear the tragic words “Depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”

Now in verses 10-14, we see the reason for God’s judgment against them as it reads...

VI. Verses 10-14:

- A. Verses 10-11: ***For thy violence against thy brother Jacob shame shall cover thee, and thou shalt be cut off for ever. ¹¹In the day that thou stoodest on the other side, in the day that the strangers carried away captive his forces, and foreigners entered into his gates, and cast lots upon Jerusalem, even thou wast as one of them.*** And Edom was cut off forever. Physically they were completely defeated. When the Babylonians took Israel into captivity, entering the gates of Jerusalem, Edom stood on the side, delighting in their downfall. Now notice the fact that the reason cited for their downfall is not God’s despising or hatred of Esau and his descendants, but rather their just dessert as enemies of God’s people. Spiritually, this would represent all who stand opposed to the doctrine of the true Gospel of God’s grace in Christ alone. He continues in verse 12 saying,
- B. Verses 12-13: ***But thou shouldest not have looked on the day of thy brother in the day that he became a stranger; <taken captive to a strange land> neither shouldest thou have rejoiced over the children of Judah in the day of their destruction; <You took delight in their physical downfall> neither shouldest thou have spoken proudly in the day of distress. <Scoffing at their distress. This reminds me of those religious enemies of the gospel who take delight and feel proud in their huge numbers and enjoy the lack of success (as they measure it) of true Gospel ministries.> ¹³Thou shouldest not have entered into the gate of my people in the day of their calamity; yea, thou shouldest not have looked on their affliction in the day of their calamity, <Again, in delight> nor have laid hands on their substance in the day of their calamity;*** Edom joined in taking the spoils of war from Israel’s demise and he adds in verse 14...

- VII. Verse 14: ***Neither shouldest thou have stood in the crossway, to cut off those of his that did escape; neither shouldest thou have delivered up those of his that did remain in the day of distress.*** They not only stood by but gathered at cross roads to finish off those trying to escape and seizing those who remained behind, they turned them over to the Chaldeans or Babylonians. Now what I wanted you to see in verses 10-14 is that Edom’s prophesied destruction was justly deserved and its cause is cited as the just reward for their evil. Don’t blame God because He simply acts justly in His righteous indignation against their sins. And so it is spiritually. Men and women perish eternally due unto their own sins and so, God is vindicated in His judgments. He is not the villain simply because He chose to glorify Himself in the salvation of some (His elect) by extracting the just penalty for their sins in the death of His beloved Son, dying in their place. Those who perish, do so in their refusal to believe and value that – God’s way of salvation by Christ alone.

- VIII. Verse 15: And then in verse 15 we see that by whatever standard we judge others, we shall be judged as it reads, ***“For the day of the LORD is near upon all the heathen: <The day of judgment is fixed and determined by God...> as thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee: thy reward shall return upon thine own head.”*** What you sow is what you reap. Physically, Edom ceased to exist just a few short years (some say 5 or so years) after the destruction of Jerusalem. And likewise for the spiritual house of Esau, in their insistence on being judged according to something that proceeds from the sinner, they will just as certainly reap just what that sin-tainted “something” deserves – God’s eternal wrath.
- IX. Verse 16: In verse 16, we see this inevitability of God’s wrath against all sin as it reads, ***“For as ye have drunk upon my holy mountain, so shall all the heathen drink continually, yea, they shall drink, and they shall swallow down, and they shall be as though they had not been.”*** There’s no trace left of that physical nation today. Here we see that God’s vengeance shall be complete. And the spiritual house of Esau will swallow down the cup of God’s wrath so as to experience the full measure of His wrath against their sins. Now that cup of God’s just wrath against sin shall be emptied out due unto the sins of all. For the Esaus it will be swallowed in eternal misery. Oh, but good news for the Jacobs! Remember as Christ approached the cross, He agonized over His pending death, praying to the Father that if it were possible to “let this cup pass from me” adding “nevertheless, not as I will but as thou wilt” (Matt. 26:39). He drank the full measure of the cup of God’s wrath for all the sins of all He came to save.
- X. Verses 17-18: But now in verse 17, we see the hope and exaltation of the house of Jacob, the objects of God’s everlasting love in Christ, their Savior as we read ***“But upon mount Zion shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness; and the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions. ¹⁸And the house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau for stubble, and they shall kindle in them, and devour them; and there shall not be any remaining of the house of Esau; for the LORD hath spoken it.***
- A. Now here the Prophet begins to speak exclusively of spiritual Israel, the spiritual house of Jacob – those chosen by God from among all nations for eternal deliverance. Mount Zion refers to the bride of Christ – His purchased church. And for them there shall be deliverance. No mention of any condition such as “If they’ll accept Jesus, or believe, or get baptized” (or anything else). No ifs! The religion of “If you...” describes the proud house of Esau.
- B. But in the house of Jacob there shall be holiness. Their holiness is found in Christ, their Substitute. They have His very perfect righteousness imputed or reckoned to their account. The just wrath due unto their sins has been satisfied in the death of their Savior. Propitiation, satisfaction to God’s justice has been made. Therein is the love of God for the Jacobs. Jacob have I loved.

- C. And notice it says they shall possess their possessions. This refers to the fact that in time, each and every one of them will come to take hold by faith that which they were given in Christ before the world began, and which He purchased for them in due time by His death on the cross.
- D. And verse 18 speaks of how there won't be a divided spiritual Israel as represented by the uniting of Jacob (representing the 2 tribes of Judah) and Joseph (representing the 10 tribes of the Northern Kingdom of Israel). And in history the Jews physically conquered Edom, the house of Esau, but spiritually this speaks of the final destruction of all who persist in opposing Christ and God's way of salvation in and by Him alone.

XI. Verses 19-20: And then verses 19 and 20 further emphasizes Edom's total destruction as it reads, "***And they of the south shall possess the mount of Esau; and they of the plain the Philistines: and they shall possess the fields of Ephraim, and the fields of Samaria: and Benjamin shall possess Gilead. ²⁰And the captivity of this host of the children of Israel <the great number of Jews who had been taken captive> shall possess that of the Canaanites, even unto Zarephath; and the captivity of Jerusalem, which is in Sepharad, shall possess the cities of the south.***" These are descriptions of the surrounding areas and is indicative again of the whole country be taken – the completeness of their destruction.

XII. Verse 21: And then in the final verse, we see it is the Lord's Kingdom as we read, "***And saviours shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be the LORD'S.***" Scripture declares there is only 1 Savior and that there is no salvation in any other – "***...none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.***" (Acts 4:12). But the word "saviours" here means deliverers or judges and it is referring to preachers of the Gospel who point sinners to the Savior. The Gospel message would and has gone out to all nations and it judges its hearers. It preaches to all both a just God (who shall punish all sin) as well as a loving and merciful Savior. If you're given faith to believe, it's the best news you'll ever hear – the savor of life unto life as the scripture puts it (2 Cor. 2:16). But the same message is the savor of death to all who reject it. This kingdom is not established by the hand of man. That would make it your kingdom, but this eternal kingdom shall be the Lord's! It's single-handedly established by His doing and dying.

XIII. Closing:

So to which spiritual family do you belong – the Jacobs or the Esaus? I'm sure these 2 twins, being born of the same parents, bore some resemblance to each other as most siblings do. And that's true of the spiritual Jacobs and Esaus as they are born into this world. To the believers at Ephesus, Paul wrote how being born dead in trespasses and sins, they were by nature the children of wrath, even as others (Eph. 2:1-3). You couldn't tell them apart. The Bible teaches that all have sinned, that there is none righteous, no not one (Rom. 3). So, both the Jacobs and the Esaus are deserving of God's just wrath against their sins.

I found some interesting commentary by John Gill concerning when the Jews destroyed Edom. He noted that they were defeated by Judas Maccabeus (MACK-uh-bees) but their final end was at the hand of the high priest, Hyrcanus (heer-KAY-nus). He killed them and took their spoils but then permitted some of the survivors to live in what had been their own country provided they would be circumcised, conform to the Jewish laws and become as one people with them. And history tells us that they did assimilate and become one with them so as to be recognized as Jews and no longer as Edomites.

That's what takes place when by God's grace, He brings one of His "saviors" (little letter 's') a Gospel preacher, our way and by the power of the Holy Spirit humbles us and causes us to identify with God's people who no longer exalt ourselves, but see our certain exaltation in Christ alone. We thereby discover we are of the house of Jacob. We looked like Esau. And like Jacob and Esau we're sinners who all, outside of Christ, deserve the same end as Esau. But God in time, makes those of the house of Jacob to be mercy beggars who come to see their only hope for salvation is in Christ alone. And if with the heart you come to truly see your desperate need for God's mercy and grace in Christ, to stand before a holy God unblameable, without sin, accepted in Christ based on His imputed righteousness alone, then you too can trace your spiritual lineage back to Jacob. Christ said of all His sheep, all of the spiritual household of Jacob, that they shall come to Him (John 6:37). Believe on Him (His doing and dying alone).

In preparing this message, I listened to a sermon preached by our former pastor and he made an interesting observation. You'll recall back in verse 10 it says that the house of Esau would be "cut off for ever." He pointed out how this phrase "cut off" in the Hebrew is defined the same as the word translated "undone" in Isaiah 6:5 when the Prophet said, "***Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; <cut off> because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.***" With the eyes of faith Isaiah saw that if judged in his sins, he would be no different than the objects of God's just hatred. God would be just to cut him off just as he does the house of Esau. But notice he didn't say he was cut off forever. We don't really see the depth of God's hatred against our sins until we see the King – what it takes for His forgiveness of our sins – the death of His dear Son in our place. Isaiah beheld God's glory in Christ, as God humbled him to see the promised Messiah in whom he was not cut off, but rather who would endure God's just wrath as His Surety and Substitute so as to drink the cup of Isaiah's deserved damnation dry.

As we celebrate the birth of our Savior, let our consideration of Him be inseparable from our appreciation of His great accomplishment of salvation for His people. When the Christ child was just 8 days old, He was taken to Jerusalem to be circumcised in obedience to the Law of Moses. And there was a man there named Simeon to whom God had promised he would not die until He had seen the promised Messiah. And when Joseph and Mary brought the child Jesus into the temple, Simeon took Him into his arms and blessed God, and he didn't say, "Oh, what a precious little baby," but rather he said, ***"Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: ³⁰For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,"*** (Luke 2:29-30). May your eyes be blessed to see beyond the babe in the manger so as to see your salvation in Him.

What is the ground or basis of your salvation? That will reveal which of these 2 spiritual families you currently identify with. Know this: There's only 1 difference between the Jacobs and the Esaus and that difference is in the Person and finished work of the One we celebrate every day of the year, the Savior, Christ the Lord.

Footnote from the author: While this sermon was prepared and delivered by me, I often utilize the commentaries, study helps, and teachings of others to supplement my own prayerful study of the scriptures. Since this document was not originally prepared for publication in print, please excuse and recognize that it was unfeasible to properly identify and credit all of the various original sources used to develop the content herein. Ultimately, it is my sincere and foremost objective to accurately present the gospel of God's grace found in the only infallible source, God's word itself – the Bible.