

**Living Messages
of the
Books of The Bible**

GENESIS TO MALACHI

BY

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CHAPTER THIRTY

THE MESSAGE OF OBADIAH

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- i. By Act of the denied Lord.
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- iii. By poetic Justice. "**As thou hast done, it shall be.**"

IV. The Last Word. "**The Kingdom shall be the Lord's**"

THIS prophecy occupies only one page in our Bible, and is characterized by the absence of many things with which we are familiar in the Old Testament Scriptures.

Indeed, the first impression made upon the mind by the reading of this very brief prophecy is that it has very little in the nature of a message to this age.

We may lay it down, however, as a principle always to be observed and acted upon, that those passages or books of Scripture which seem to have least in them need the most careful attention, and invariably yield the most remarkable results.

Isidore, in his allegories of the Sacred Scriptures, said of this book:

"Among all the prophets, he is the briefest in number of words; in the grace of mysteries he is their equal."

That is most certainly true. The book contains one set message. The identity of the prophet and the historic setting are matters of minor importance. The message is quite independent of either.

The peculiar value of this one brief page is that the antagonism between Jacob and Esau is brought into clearer view than in any other of the prophetic writings. Edom was descended from Esau, and Israel from Jacob.

The antagonism between them is patent throughout the Bible.

In the book of Genesis occurs a simple and yet most suggestive declaration: "**The children struggled together within her.**" From that hint of the consciousness of Rebekah, the story of the antagonism continues. It finds its fullest expression in the declaration, "**Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.**"

In regard to that statement we must remember that GOD's love of Jacob and His hatred of Esau were not the causes from which their characters resulted, but the inevitable results of what they

were in character. When we come to the New Testament these two antagonistic principles are still seen, and they are at last remarkably focused in two persons.

The ultimate issue of all Jacob represented - I am not now referring to his meanness, his failure, to that which gave GOD so much trouble with him; but to the underlying principle and aspiration and spiritual conception for which he stood - is manifested in a person, and that Person is JESUS of Nazareth. He is the final fruitage after the flesh of those principles embodied in Abraham, expressed through Isaac and Jacob, and preserved in the nation.

The ultimate issue of all that Esau represented is also focused in a person.

The king of the Jews at the time of the death of JESUS was an Edomite. Herod was of the race of Esau. To him JESUS never spoke. He once sent him a message thus: "**Go ye, and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures to day and to morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected,**" a most remarkable revelation of the antagonism between the two ideals.

The words sound harsh and strange from the lips of JESUS, but they afford a startling revelation of the whole truth concerning Esau. The background of the picture presented to us by Obadiah is Jacob; the foreground is Esau. Jacob and those descended from him are seen passing through suffering, which is of the nature of chastisement, to ultimate restoration.

Esau is seen proud, rebellious, defiant, moving towards ultimate destruction.

The permanent value of this book is that of its interpretation of Esau. It brings out, in one single page of the Divine library, into clear relief and vivid outline the meaning of that word already quoted, "**Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.**"

To quote again from one of the fathers of the Church, this book historically tells the story of the destruction of Edam, and allegorically sets forth the destruction of the flesh.

Edom is Esau enlarged into national life.

In the book of Obadiah we discover:

- the essential evil in Esau,
- the supreme manifestation of that evil, and
- the inevitable issue thereof.

Finally we find that the stern, hard word of prophecy ends with a gleam of hope even for "**the mount of Esau.**"

Let us summarize these matters before considering them in detail.

The essential evil of Esau was pride. The supreme manifestation of that evil was violence, wrong done to others. The inevitable issue thereof was retribution. The last word in the book is the sum total of all prophetic utterance: "**Saviours shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be the LORD's.**"

The essential evil is graphically set forth in the words: "**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?**"

"**The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee**" is the revealing word.

The result of that pride of heart was expressed in Edam's defiance: "**O 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?**"

We at once recognize that this is an actual geographical description of the place of the Edomite nation, those rocky fastnesses in which they lived, and in the seclusion and strength of which they seemed able to defy all invasion, and did indeed for long years successfully defy all attempts to dislodge them. They dwelt literally in the clefts of the rock in a district which gained the name of Petra because of its rocky nature. Hemmed in by rocks, they occupied a tract of land which was considered impregnable.

The difficulty of dealing with the declaration, "**The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee,**" is due to the fact that we have lost our sense of proportion when we deal with sin.

There has been so much dealing with specific sins that we have ceased to tremble when essential sin is described. If we speak of drunkenness, of lust, of theft, of lying, men pause for a moment awed by the consciousness of the sinfulness of such things. Yet, as a matter of fact, these are none other than the necessary, natural outcome of something far more deadly.

In this sentence the sin of sins is named, "**The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee.**" Pride of heart is that attitude of life which declares its ability to do without GOD. I am not prepared to say the Edomites had no gods, for I think there are evidences that they had; but the nation springing from Esau imagined that it was independent of GOD.

The New Testament flashes its light upon the whole history of Esau and the Edomites in a graphic and appalling description of Esau, "**that profane person, Esau**" Superficial thinking associates the word with indecorous and lewd speech. It has a profounder significance. A profane person is a person against the temple.

- a profane person is one who has no spiritual conception, who sets no value on a birthright, and will sell it for red pottage.
- a profane person has no consciousness of the eternal, no commerce with the spiritual, is proud of animal ability, and acts as though independent of GOD.
- profanity never prays, worships, never speaks of spiritual intercourse, has no traffic with the eternities, no commerce with Heaven."

Then notice the words, "**Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars.**"

That is GOD's description of Edom.

The eagle in Eastern symbolism is always a type of Deity. It is as though the prophet's message to Edom was, Thou having dethroned GOD, hast deified thyself, and made thyself to be thine one and only god. The setting of the nest among the stars high up in the rocky fastnesses is a figure of self-protection. Thus, the description is graphic portraiture.

If that be the essential evil, notice carefully what is the supreme manifestation thereof.

It is that of violence; that of wrong done to others, and of rejoicing in the presence of their suffering. **"For thy violence against thy brother Jacob shame shall cover thee, and thou shalt be cut off for ever. In 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."**

The Edomites had looked upon the suffering of the people of GOD, and had been complacent in the presence of it; more, had rejoiced over it; and yet more, had taken a definite part in it. This was the supreme manifestation of the evil, and it was caused by the fact that there was in the heart of Esau opposition to all that Jacob represented. Jacob represented faith in GOD. He stood for a spiritual ideal. Perhaps I should more accurately express the fact if I said that Jacob stumbled after a spiritual ideal. The supreme matter is, that he saw it.

In the deepest of his nature he desired it, He set his face towards it notwithstanding all his failure. There was in Jacob a principle upon which GOD could work for the accomplishment of His purpose. In spite of all his blundering, he believed in GOD, he believed in the spiritual.

That ideal Esau hated.

When the day of Jacob's calamity came, when Jacob was being scourged, chastised, Edom was glad; and crossed over and entered into the gate, and joined in unholy opposition, and snatched the substance from his brother.

The inevitable issue of such hatred is retribution. Use any other word which seems more accurately to fit the case - punishment, judgment, if you so will - only remember that judgment has many meanings and many applications, and that judgment as definite punishment even to destruction, is the thought here.

Edom said, **"Who shall bring me down to the ground?"** and the Lord replied, **"Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down . . . 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? And thy mighty men, O Teman, shall be dismayed."**

The GOD without Whom Edom declares it is able to live successfully, is the GOD Who visits Edom with destruction.

Though Edom climb as high as the stars and build its nests, and mount as the eagle in self-deification; the GOD above and around, from Whom he cannot escape, will bring him down, and

prove to him the unutterable folly of his animalism, and the heinousness of his pride.

GOD will do this by overruling the policies and arrangements Edom can make:

"All the men of thy confederacy have brought thee even to the border: the men that were at peace with thee have deceived thee, and prevailed against thee; they that eat thy bread have laid a wound under thee."

By the cooperation of the very forces in which Edom takes pride, GOD is working for Edom's destruction. Edom declares: I can do without GOD. I will be confederate with other men, will enter into political arrangements with them, and international treaties shall exist between us, and thus I shall be safe. GOD replies: I will bring thee to the dust, and I will do it through the men in whom you are putting your trust. The very forces on which you depend are working together with Me, not for your making, but for your destruction.

The judgment of GOD upon Edom is poetic justice: **"As thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee."** The New Testament states it thus: **"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption."**

That is the story of Esau, sowing to the flesh, answering the passions of the flesh, doing this in opposition to Jacob, and rejoicing over Jacob's trouble. In the end the flesh itself becomes the weapon of Edom's destruction. **"As thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee."**

We now come to the last word of this prophecy, **"And the captivity of this host of the children of Israel 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. And saviours shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be the LORD's."** The last word is the final one of all prophecy, **"the kingdom shall be the LORD's."**

The preliminary movement is that of the deliverance of the despised Jacob. He is led through all the suffering towards the realization of the Divine purpose, and as a result saviours appear on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau. I have already said we must be careful to remember that judgment has many meanings and various applications. Judgment may mean administration towards righteousness. I do not hesitate to say that in this last word the truth is expressed that, by the way of Jacob's redemption, restoration, and realization of the Divine purpose, there is hope for Esau.

The final word then is one concerning that day in which all conflict will end, all factions pass out of sight, and all racial divisions disappear, **"the kingdom shall be the LORD's."**

The Seer of Patmos saw the ultimate, and described it in the words, **"Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city . . . The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ."**

Inclusively the living message is to be found in this last sentence, **"the kingdom shall be the LORD's."** The conflict between animalism and spirituality still continues, but **"the kingdom**

shall be the LORD's."

In spite of all difficulty, persecution, and opposition, Jacob will become Israel, and Esau will have judgment by the way of saviours. Restoration and perfection for Jacob; retribution and destruction for Esau. These are certain. Yet the profane may become sacred, for saviours appear upon the mount of Zion.

The living message of this book is to individuals also, for all its principles are operating in human life.

What sort of man am I? Am I profane as was Esau, or am I like Jacob? I do not think there are any other types. Even those of us who believe in GOD, who in the deepest of us have faith and real desire to fulfill the purpose of GOD, are Jacobs.

He has to take us to the Jabbok, and cripple us in order to crown us. He has to be patient with us; and He is patient, or we had been lost. The GOD Who chastises us and leads us through trouble is set upon doing us good at the latter end; and all the discipline and trouble, pain and punishment, are in order that at last we may realize our own deepest purpose, and satisfy His heart.

Are we profane, doing without GOD? We may be wonderfully successful materially; we may mount up as eagles; we may be our own gods, acting independently of Heaven, of the spiritual world, and building our nests among the stars; but already GOD is bringing us down. Our very confederacy with flesh is working our ruin.

The profane man can be made sacred, and if we will but recognize that "**the kingdom shall be the LORD's**," and will but kiss His scepter and bow to His control, and bend our proud necks in worship, and our knees in prayer, yielding ourselves to His revealed Saviour King, then He will make again the vessels, and we also may become His chosen. If not, all our boasting and all our building cannot secure our salvation.

~ end of chapter 30 ~
