

I.N.I.

Fourth Sunday of Easter

April 25, 2010

Obadiah 1:1-9

In Christ Jesus, our Humble Savior, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

This morning our study through the Old Testament takes us to the little book of Obadiah. About the only thing most people know about Obadiah is that his name is hard to pronounce. Maybe some know that he was a prophet and that his book is one of the 12 Minor Prophets in the Old Testament. But beyond that most people don't know anymore.

Even though Obadiah is obscure—for not much is known about the man—and even though his message is pretty much unknown by many people, yet his message is as applicable today as if he wrote it about our country America yesterday.

From the first verse of our text in Obadiah's prophecy we see that this message was a vision. What Obadiah writes was not the product of his own reflections, his own keen insight into the world of nations and politics and the religious condition of his day; nor was it merely the application of God's Word to a given situation. It was a vision, a divine revelation through inspiration from God about His purpose and will concerning this ungodly nation. To avoid any misconception about that Obadiah states in verse 1: **THE VISION OF OBADIAH. THUS SAYS THE LORD GOD CONCERNING EDMOM.**

Edom was a small country of very mountainous terrain. It was 110 miles long and only 30 miles wide. It was south of the Dead Sea and east of the Sinai Peninsula. The country Edom got its name from Esau, Jacob's brother, who was also called Edom. Esau means "hairy" and Edom means "red."

After having driven out its inhabitants, Esau established his dwelling place in this area. That was some 1,500 years before Obadiah's time. The country being rugged, rocky and mountainous was therefore naturally well fortified. Many of the cities were built on cliffs and ledges which served as natural built protection for the people.

But even though the Edomites and the Israelites were blood brothers, both coming from Isaac, these counties were never at peace. The people of Edom were proud, vengeful and cruel. And it is because of Edom's cruelty toward God's people and their pride in themselves that the LORD sent Obadiah to deliver this message of coming destruction to this little but powerful nation.

In Prov. 16:18-19 Solomon declares: **PRIDE GOES BEFORE DESTRUCTION, AND A HAUGHTY SPIRIT BEFORE A FALL. BETTER TO BE OF A HUMBLE SPIRIT WITH THE LOWLY, THAN TO DIVIDE THE SPOIL WITH THE PROUD.**

The Lord in His Word says quite a bit about pride and none of it is good. Again in Proverbs the Lord declares: **IN THE MOUTH OF A FOOL IS A ROD OF PRIDE, and A MAN'S PRIDE WILL BRING HIM LOW, BUT THE HUMBLE IN SPIRIT WILL RETAIN HONOR.**

Again and again the Lord proclaims that He will destroy the proud. He brought judgment down upon the pride of the Philistines; the pride of Moab; the pride of Assyria; the pride of Judah and Jerusalem. Again Solomon writes: **WHEN PRIDE COMES, THEN COMES SHAME; BUT WITH THE HUMBLE IS WISDOM and BY PRIDE COMES NOTHING BUT STRIFE—** quarrels, fighting, hatred.

We hear of men in the Bible who hardened their hearts against God and His Word because of their sinful pride and suffered greatly—Pharaoh of Egypt; great Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon; Ahab of the northern Kingdom of Israel; King Herod of Judea.

Jesus lists the sin of pride along with adultery, murder, theft, blasphemy, deceit, and fornication as coming from out of a sinful heart. John writes in I John 2:16 **FOR ALL THAT IS IN THE WORLD -- THE LUST OF THE FLESH, THE LUST OF THE EYES, AND THE PRIDE OF LIFE -- IS NOT OF THE FATHER BUT IS OF THE WORLD.**

Unfortunately the people of Edom were filled with pride. Their nation had existed for over 1,500 years. They had become very wealthy and very powerful and had made many allegiances with much larger neighboring countries. But in their pride the people not only forgot the Lord, but also despised Him by despising His people the Israelites when they were in need. They didn't help when they were attacked by their enemies. In fact they stood by on their high vantage places and watched and rejoiced in the destruction of God's people. They also plundered the goods that were left over. This rivalry and family feud which began when Jacob deceived Esau had continued all these years, even though Jacob and Esau had made peace a long, long time ago.

And because of all of this the Lord foretold the complete extermination of this once great and mighty nation. It is interesting to see how man proposes but God disposes. In other words how man in his pride plans and schemes to do this and to do that and how God uses the very same things that man proposes to turn against him or to fail him.

In our text the Lord even tells the leaders and people of Edom what is going to happen to them. He clearly spells it out for them and there is nothing they can do to change it.

Edom's pride lay in 4 areas:

- 1) Power
- 2) Wealth
- 3) Alliances
- 4) Wisdom

The Lord begins by telling Edom: **BEHOLD, I WILL MAKE YOU SMALL AMONG THE NATIONS; YOU SHALL BE GREATLY DESPISED.** No longer will they loom large over other nations. No longer will the other nations look with admiration at them. Their pride has deceived them. We read in vs. 3-4: **THE PRIDE OF YOUR HEART HAS DECEIVED YOU, YOU WHO DWELL IN THE CLEFTS OF THE ROCK, WHOSE HABITATION IS HIGH; YOU WHO SAY IN YOUR HEART, 'WHO WILL BRING ME DOWN TO THE GROUND?' THOUGH YOU ASCEND AS HIGH AS THE EAGLE, AND THOUGH YOU SET YOUR NEST AMONG THE STARS, FROM THERE I WILL BRING YOU DOWN," SAYS THE LORD.**

Their pride was in their power and in their position. They lived up in the mountain tops; up where the eagles fly. The innumerable caves offered refuge for the people and tremendous vantage points for surprise attacks against any approaching enemy. From all practical purposes and human viewpoint their fortresses were impregnable. But all of these advantages, all of this defense and power will be useless.

Their pride also rested in their wealth. There were very fertile valleys in Edom which produced an abundance of crops. Rich copper and iron mines dotted the hillsides and Edom controlled the great trade routes from Egypt through the King's highway on the eastern side of the Jordan River running north to Damascus and on into Asia and ultimately Europe. The people demanded tolls and taxes from the traders passing through their land. Over the years they had become immensely rich.

But the Lord says all of these riches piled up for centuries would be taken away from them, no matter how carefully hidden they may be. We read vs. 5-6: **IF THIEVES HAD COME TO YOU, IF ROBBERS BY NIGHT -- OH, HOW YOU WILL BE CUT OFF! -- WOULD THEY NOT HAVE STOLEN TILL THEY HAD ENOUGH? IF GRAPE-GATHERERS HAD COME TO**

YOU, WOULD THEY NOT HAVE LEFT SOME GLEANINGS? OH, HOW ESAU SHALL BE SEARCHED OUT! HOW HIS HIDDEN TREASURES SHALL BE SOUGHT AFTER!

Thieves and robbers usually leave some things behind after they have stolen what they came for; grape gatherers overlook a few grapes on the vines for the poor and needy; but not for rich Edom. Nothing will be left. They will go from riches to rags; from rulers to beggars!

They also placed their pride in their many alliances with other nations. Since they had grown prosperous and powerful many nations were more than eager to make treaties, pacts and defense agreements with them. The Edomites trusted in their allies, rather than in the Lord. With so many trusted and powerful friends how could anything bad ever happen to them. But their trusted allies would turn on them, would not take them in as refugees. Edom like Cain would become fugitives—people without a country. We read in vs. 7: **ALL THE MEN IN YOUR CONFEDERACY---your allies---SHALL FORCE YOU TO THE BORDER; THE MEN AT PEACE WITH YOU SHALL DECEIVE YOU AND PREVAIL AGAINST YOU. THOSE WHO EAT YOUR BREAD SHALL LAY A TRAP FOR YOU. NO ONE IS AWARE OF IT.**

And finally the Lord would destroy Edom by destroying the wisdom of their leaders. They would not make the right and proper decisions. When their fortresses begin to fall and their armies are defeated; when their riches vanish and when their trusted allies prove unfaithful then the people will turn to their wise leaders for good advice and these leaders will make only wrong judgments, unwise decisions and do wrong things. We read vs. 8: **WILL I NOT IN THAT DAY, SAYS THE LORD, EVEN DESTROY THE WISE MEN FROM EDOM, AND UNDERSTANDING FROM THE MOUNTAINS OF ESAU?**

Proud, boastful, rich, powerful, wise Edom will be leveled and more than that annihilated to the last man. The Lord says: **THEN YOUR MIGHTY MEN, O TEMAN, SHALL BE DISMAYED, TO THE END THAT EVERYONE FROM THE MOUNTAINS OF ESAU MAY BE CUT OFF BY SLAUGHTER.**

The application of this lesson is only all too clear for us. I couldn't help but think of how much this picture of Edom is a picture of our own nation. A nation which prides itself in its power and position. A nation which prides itself in its wealth and riches. A nation which prides itself in its allies and friends. A nation which prides itself in its wise and understanding leaders; but a nation which on the whole does not pride itself in the Lord God.

Our nation has made abominable laws allowing the killing of the unborn, even the harvesting of tissue from aborted babies. Our nation has passed laws that promote homosexuality and same-sex marriage. Our nation's schools promote evolution and humanism.

But we are also America. We too need to take this lesson to heart—as individual people and as a Christian congregation and synod. How often haven't we become inflated with pride; with our position in life, with our job or family? Have we become inflated with pride over our riches and wealth? How often have we placed our confidence and comfort in our many friends rather than our Lord and His wonderful words of healing? And how often haven't we turned to our own understating and wisdom when confronted by the problems and troubles of this life?

We all by nature are proud and conceited! By nature we put our confidence and trust in the things we can see, touch and possess. We are really no different, by nature, than the people of Edom.

But thankfully there is a big difference in our spiritual attitude toward the Lord. The Holy Spirit has brought us to a knowledge of our sins and sinful pride. We daily must admit to our own desiring and scheming and falling into sins of thought, word and deed. We see a long list of sinfulness in every one of our lives.

But the Holy Spirit has also led us to acknowledge those sins, repent of them and look to Jesus for full and free forgiveness. He has led us to throw ourselves at the foot of Jesus' cross and confess our sins and bask in the joy of His shed blood that washes us clean. He has led us to turn to our Savior and His Word in good time and bad, in poverty and riches. He has led us to poke out the eyes of our wisdom and lean not on our own understanding but listen to and follow after His wisdom and truth from His Word.

The Holy Spirit has led us to see our real treasure is in heaven, where moth and rust cannot destroy; our real wealth is in the forgiveness of sins and eternal life promised to us; our greatest alliance is in Jesus, our best Friend who made peace between us and our Heavenly Father; and real wisdom is found in God's Word announcing that Jesus has come to take our place and provide a righteousness through His perfect life and atoning sacrifice that is ours alone through faith.

May the message of this little one chapter book, awaken in every one of us a recognition of the sinful pride that lurks in our sinful hearts. May it also lead us to repentant sorrow over those many sins and turn our hearts to the **ONE THING NEEDFUL**—Jesus Christ and His Word.

Our Lord has promised us: **BUT SEEK FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND ALL THESE THINGS SHALL BE ADDED TO YOU.**

Amen.