

OBADIAH 1:5-9 - THE DESTRUCTION OF WISDOM

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I. Obadiah 1:5-9

- A. Background – Biblical and historical development of twin brothers: Jacob (who is Israel) and Esau (who is Edom).
- B. Israel, the offspring of Jacob, who stood in the line of God’s blessing, was opposed by the offspring of Jacob’s brother Esau—the Edomites.
- C. Specifically, the Edomites opposed Israel in her wilderness wanderings and sided with her enemies at the overthrow of Jerusalem—even rejoicing in the day of Israel’s destruction (Oba. 1:12).
- D. We also saw that Edom, in her opposition to Israel, typifies those nations which remain willingly ignorant of God’s promises concerning Israel. Thus, the historic overthrow of Edom serves as both a *demonstration* and a *warning* to those nations which oppose God’s purposes in His elect nation at the time of the end.
- E. The apostle Paul tells us, “whatever things were written before were written for our learning” (Rom. 15:4a)
 1. Numerous principles are found in this book concerning both the *fact* of Edom’s downfall and the *means* by which it was accomplished.
- F. We saw several key concepts in our previous study of verses 1-4:
 1. God would judge Edom by *means* of foreign nations which would gather together against her.
 2. Edom was deceived by Pride—she believed she was invincible in her rocky citadel. At a time when she thought herself immune, her downfall would come.
- G. The passage before us today, verses 5-9, will amplify aspects of her downfall.
 1. We will encounter a frightening principle found in Scripture: the *means* which God uses to overthrow a people often includes *their own participation in their downfall*.
 2. In their continued rejection of God, they subject themselves to a gradual process whereby what was once their wisdom inexorably turns to foolishness.
 3. By the time opposition rises from external enemies, the internal damage has already been done—the ability to respond is no longer present, the internal core of the nation has already crumbled.
 4. It then becomes a simple matter for enemies to sack the shell of what once seemed an unassailable strong nation.

II. Obadiah 1:5-9**A. Obadiah 1:5-9**

"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! All the men in your confederacy 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. Will I not in that day," says the LORD, "Even destroy the wise [men] from Edom, and understanding from the mountains of Esau? 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."

B. Themes

1. There are several important themes expressed in this passage concerning Edom's judgment.
2. Although the themes are varied, a common element unites them—the active participation of God in undermining a nation which opposes His purpose.
 - a) According to secular historians—who deny the handiwork of God in the events of history—the fall of Edom could be rationally explained.
 - (1) As we saw in our last study of Obadiah, in about 440 B.C., Edom was attacked by a coalition of Arab tribes and by the year 312, their homeland was dominated by the Nabataean Arabs [Bullock:256].
 - (2) For many historians, Edom's historic overthrow is seen as just another "down" in the "ups and downs" of minor nations which characterize the ebb-and-flow of the record of history.
 - b) Yet this passage, and many other similar passages to which we could point, make clear that God *is* actively involved in the affairs of history. History is truly HIS STORY: He sets up and deposes kings according to His purposes and principles (Dan. 2:21).
3. In the five verses before us we find the following themes concerning God's active participation in the demise of Edom:
 - a) THEME #1 - Judgment by God is more devastating than judgment by man.
 - b) THEME #2 – Military might and readiness are of no avail once God's hand turns against a nation.
 - c) THEME#3 - Wisdom becomes foolishness and vision perishes as God undermines a nation from within.
4. I propose to look at each of these themes, but paying particular attention to the last one in light of our own nation and our own time in history.

III. THEME #1 - Judgment by God is more devastating than judgment by man.

- A. In verse 5 we read:
"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?"
- B. God, speaking through Obadiah, emphasizes how different the judgment of Edom would be than if she had merely been robbed by purely human means.
- C. Thieves and robbers take only the most valuable items—hauling away that which can be transported stealthily—typically leaving lesser valuables behind.
- D. Those who gather grapes do not pluck every single grape. In fact, in the law of Moses, they were specifically instructed to leave a remnant of the grapes for other less fortunate people to glean (Lev. 19:9-10).
- E. Edom's destruction would be more complete than if she had merely been picked over by human means.
- F. The emphasis here, by way of comparison, is that *nothing* would be left once God was done judging the nation.

IV. THEME #2 – Military might and readiness are of no avail once God's hand turns against a nation.

- A. In verses 6 and 7 we read:
"Oh how Esau shall be searched out! [How] his hidden treasures shall be sought after! All the men in your confederacy 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."
- B. "searched out" – from a root meaning to "dig" or "seek". The idea being that Edom would be plundered. Not only would his hidden treasures be sought after, but they would be *found*.
 1. State secrets, strategic information, things which the nation assumed were hidden—in the context most likely a reference to innumerable hiding places in the caves and rocky mountainous terrain of Edom—were, to her surprise and consternation, already known to her enemies!
 2. How could this be? It seems clear that the answer is found in the hand of God—allowing the exposure of the nation's internal secrets to her very enemies. He would see to it that Edom was suitably vulnerable at the time of her greatest need.
 3. Because of her pride, the deception under which the nation labored, she would not detect her exposed condition until it was too late.
 4. This is why verse 9 indicates, "Then your mighty men, O Teman, shall be dismayed." [Teman was the name of Esau's grandson—a term which came to describe the region where the Edomites dwelt (Gen. 36:11).]
 - a) Is not their dismay a clear indication of their surprise?

- b) The very mighty men who expected to prevail in her time of attack arise to find themselves already undone and their well-rehearsed strategies useless.
- C. Deceit and deception play a central role in Edom's destruction.
 - 1. Diplomats from surrounding nations with whom Edom had friendly relations would in fact be working toward her fall. Those whom she thought could be trusted would actually be laying a trap for her demise.
 - 2. They professed friendship and formed alliances, but ultimately betrayed her.
 - 3. The pride and deception of Edom was used by God to ensure that the plot of her false allies will go undetected.
 - a) As one version of the Old Testament puts it, "He [Edom] is bereft of understanding." Already, the ability of the Edomites to "think straight" was being compromised.
- D. As we can already see, *deception* plays a key role in the overthrow of Edom.
 - 1. In our study of verses 1 through 4, we saw that the *pride* of Edom's own heart had deceived her (verse 3).
 - 2. Now, in the passage before us, we see another more fearful mechanism at work—God's Own hand allowing the wisdom of the leadership of the nation to erode from within.

V. THEME #3 - Wisdom becomes foolishness and vision perishes as God undermines a nation from within.

- A. In verses 8 and 9 we read:

"Will I not in that day," says the LORD, "Even destroy the wise [men] from Edom, and understanding from the mountains of Esau? 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."
- B. These verses set forth God's destruction of the wise men from Edom.
 - 1. Some commentator's see nothing more here than the promise by God that he will treat the wise and mighty no differently than the common man: both are destined to be cut off—to be killed.
 - 2. While this is true, this does not do complete justice to the grammar of the passage and overlooks a fearsome principle of God:
 - a) The destruction of Edom occurs in stages.
 - b) The destruction of the populace in the final stage is indirectly the *result* of the destruction of *wisdom itself* at an earlier stage.
- C. Several clues alert us to an understanding that God is describing the *means* by which Edom will be destroyed: by first destroying wisdom from her midst.
 - 1. The passage describes a clear progression:
 - a) God indicates He will destroy understanding (not just the wise, but the *ability to be wise*).

- b) The *result* of the destruction of wisdom brings about dismay.
 - (1) Verse 9 begins with a conjunction rendered by most translations as either “and” or “then.”
 - (a) “THEN your mighty men, O Teman, shall be dismayed”
 - (2) The conjunction acts like the hitch between two boxcars of a train—the second boxcar arrives because it is towed by the boxcar ahead.
 - (a) The dismay of the mighty men is a *result* of the destruction of wisdom.
 - (b) *First* comes the destruction of wisdom itself.
 - (c) The loss of wisdom spreads like leaven to undermining the nation from within.
 - (d) Once the nation is severely weakened, compromised by her own internal darkness, she proves no match for her enemies.
 - (3) In a similar way to which Samson’s strength departed when his hair was cut, the mighty men, being deceived, are unaware that their power has departed. By the time they ‘awake’ and rouse themselves to respond to the external threat, they are dismayed to find themselves unable to respond effectively.
- 2. Numerous parallel passages convey the same concept: as people reject God, He turns their wisdom into foolishness.
 - a) Job 12:16-17
With Him [are] strength and prudence. The deceived and the deceiver [are] His. He leads counselors away plundered, And makes fools of the judges.
 - b) Isaiah 44:24-25
Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, And He who formed you from the womb: "I [am] the LORD, who makes all [things], Who stretches out the heavens all alone, Who spreads abroad the earth by Myself; Who frustrates the signs of the babblers, And drives diviners mad; Who turns wise men backward, And makes their knowledge foolishness;
 - c) Isaiah 29:9-14 – concerning the nations who attack Jerusalem:
Pause and wonder! Blind yourselves and be blind! They are drunk, but not with wine; They stagger, but not with intoxicating drink. For the LORD has poured out on you The spirit of deep sleep, And has closed your eyes, namely, the prophets; And He has covered your heads, [namely], the seers. The whole vision has become to you like the words of a book that is sealed, which [men] deliver to one who is literate, saying, "Read this, please." And he says, "I cannot, for it [is] sealed." Then the book is delivered to one who is illiterate, saying, "Read this, please." And he says, "I am not literate." Therefore the Lord said: "Inasmuch as these people draw near with their mouths And honor Me with their lips, But have removed their hearts far from Me, And their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men, Therefore, behold, I will again do a marvelous work Among this people, A marvelous work and a

wonder; For the wisdom of their wise [men] shall perish, And the understanding of their prudent [men] shall be hidden."

- (1) God will remove the wisdom of the wise and the understanding of the prudent.
- (2) He will "hide" it—their minds won't be able to work out what should be obvious.
- (3) He calls it a "marvelous work" and a "wonder."
- (4) It is a spiritual work of God which is *irresistible* aside from the power of the Holy Spirit.

d) Romans 1:21-22 – God's active darkening of the ungodly
 . . . although they knew God, they did not glorify [Him] as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools,

- (1) *Futility* of the mind
 - (a) As one dictionary describes the meaning of the word as, "being unable to think clearly or correctly" [Friberg].
 - (b) Exerting the mind in an attempt to arrive at truth, but actually straying far from it—even actively embracing falsehood in the seeming pursuit of truth.
- (2) Foolish *hearts* which are darkened.
- (3) Professing to be wise, but in all reality full of foolish ideas and beliefs.
 - (a) "wise ones" is σοφοι from which we get 'sophistry' – often illustrated in our time by an appeal to abstract concepts or terms by which basic truths are circumvented or denied.
 - (b) The terrifying aspect: they themselves are completely unaware of their real condition—this is the type of deception which the book of Obadiah also sets forth.

VI. Examples

- A. In the time which remains, I hope to provide some real-world examples from our own time and place which illustrate this fearsome principle:
 1. A nation or people which oppose God will eventually be blinded by God. Their foolish hearts will be darkened and their thinking will turn to futility.
 2. They will lose the ability "to think clearly or correctly."
 3. Although numerous examples could be given, in the interest of time I will focus on two:
 - a) Our schizophrenia concerning children.
 - b) Our bankrupt fiscal policy.
 4. In Obadiah's declaration concerning Edom, God said He would, "destroy the wise [men] of Edom, and understanding from the mountains of Esau" (Oba. 1:8).

- a) In our own day, we might ask, "Who are the wise [men]?" Where do we find them in our culture?
 - (1) Those with an advanced education, whose minds have been trained in clear thinking, careful analysis, and the rules of logic.
 - (2) Lawyers, judges, doctors, scientists, economists, leaders, and politicians.
 - b) Yet it is just at these influential roles where we find some of the greatest confusion in disregard of basic issues of logic and common sense, not to mention Biblical principles.
5. What are the symptoms that indicate that such a darkening process is underway?
- a) An inability of supposedly "great minds" to see basic truths.
 - b) Frequently encountered "muddled thinking" which characterizes much writing and discussion regarding the issues involved.
 - c) The consistent denial of God's clear principles in relation to the topics involved and an unwillingness to let the Bible simply speak to the issue at hand.

VII. Our Schizophrenia concerning Children

- A. Why have I titled this example, "our *schizophrenia* concerning children"?
 1. I have in mind the definition of schizophrenia which emphasizes the *coexistence of disparate or antagonistic qualities, identities, or activities*.
 2. I will illustrate that although our culture purports to empower and love children to a greater degree, we are, in fact, a very dangerous culture within which to be a child.
 3. Nowhere is this schizophrenia more evident than in the disconnect between the rights of the child in the womb and the rights of a child having exited the womb.
- B. In the womb – powerless and without rights
 1. Abortion
 - a) Since the *Rowe vs. Wade* decision of the Supreme Court in 1973, the most dangerous place many babies will ever be exposed to is their own mother's womb.
 - b) Since 1973, more than 50 million children have been killed in the womb. This number exceeds the population of 19 different states and represents an ongoing death rate of 2.5 per minute, 160 per hour, or a staggering 1,400,000 children each year who will be 'terminated'—in the vast majority of cases for the sake of convenience.
 - c) These, the most helpless and defenseless among us, are completely powerless. They have no physical power or political means. What legal protection they had at one time has been stripped away.
 2. "Fetal Tissue"

- a) Tomorrow, the restriction on federal funding of fetal tissue experimentation enacted by former president Bush is scheduled to be reversed by present Barack Obama.¹
- b) Use of “embryonic material” for stem cell research, “is controversial because embryos must be destroyed to obtain the cells . . . [the embryos are] culled from fertility-clinic leftovers otherwise destined to be thrown away”²
- c) Fertility clinics routinely collect eggs and sperm from donors and fertilize groups of embryos. These embryos are then allowed to grow for several days after which point their viability is evaluated. Some embryos are selected to continue their development while other embryos may be frozen for possible future use. Embryos which don’t make the cut (or are unfrozen at a later date) may now be “harvested” for medical use.
- d) At present, the primary use of this “fetal tissue” will be for stem cell research—ostensibly to provide a great medical boon to society.
- e) Reading any of the literature on the topic, one is struck by the cold scientific detachment characteristic of the promoters of such policy. Specially phrased terminology serves to anesthetize both practitioners and society from recognizing the sacrifice of human life which is implicitly part of such practices.
 - (1) This befuddled language which confuses the basic issue of the genesis of life and which refuses to recognize the embryo as a human being is reminiscent of the language of the experimental Nazi doctors of the holocaust who also saw themselves as working for the betterment of the human population.
 - (a) At its immoral core, such policies are essentially no different than the reputed harvesting and selling of internal organs from prisoners in China.³
 - (b) How is it that there can be outrage concerning the harvesting of internal organs from Chinese prisoners, but our own country’s participation in harvesting from the smallest and most vulnerable of all humans finds both acceptance and legal protection?
 - (c) Is this not a clear demonstration of the futility of the mind—both an unwillingness and inability to see basic issues clearly?

¹ Under President George W. Bush, federal money for research on human embryonic stems cells was limited to those stem cell lines that were created before Aug. 9, 2001. No federal dollars could be used on research with cell lines from embryos destroyed from that point forward.

² <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/first100days/2009/03/06/obama-reverse-restrictions-stem-cell-research-funding-monday/>

³ “According to a 2006 Congressional Executive Commission report . . . China's Vice Minister of Health . . . indicated in July 2005 that as high as 95% of organ transplants in China derive from execution. It reports that over 95 percent of organs transplanted in China come from executed prisoners.” [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Organ_harvesting_in_China accessed 20090307].

3. Confusion: when does life begin?

- a) The practices of abortion and fetal tissue experimentation hang on confusion surrounding the question of "when does life begin?"
- b) This seemingly simple question apparently eludes the "wise men" of our age (in this case principally doctors, professors, and judges).
- c) At conception, the ovum and sperm unite to form a viable zygote—which soon begins to divide and develop. Even before we had the detailed knowledge of reproductive processes available to us today, conception was self-evidently when life began. Yet such clarity, which is also in alignment with Biblical teaching—continues to evade the enlightened minds of our culture.
- d) They remain unable (and in many cases unwilling) to see the simplicity of the issue—that God forms children *in the womb* and that premature termination of pregnancy is treated by Scripture as manslaughter (Ex. 21:22-23).
- e) Instead, confusion reigns concerning this basic question. Here we see sophistry entering the picture to take what could be clear and muddling matters. The question of "when life begins" is pushed aside in favor of the seemingly more nebulous question, "when does *personhood* begin."
- f) Listen to another of our "wise men" (in this case, a professor), befuddled and groping in the dark, as he addresses this issue:
 - (1) "Whether or not abortion should be legal turns on the answer to the question of whether and *at what point a fetus is a person*. This is a question that cannot be answered logically or empirically. The concept of personhood is neither logical nor empirical: It is essentially a religious, or quasi-religious idea, based on one's fundamental (and therefore unverifiable) assumptions about the nature of the world."⁴

C. Exiting the womb – the rights of the child now explode

1. Those children who survive their mother's womb soon find themselves in an environment which is swinging toward the opposite extreme.
2. The same society which denied children the basic right to life while at their most vulnerable state of development will now turn things completely on their head and promote the out-of-balance independence and "rights" of the child.
3. For a season, the child was at risk of being killed by its parents. Now, having exited the womb, the child will soon be able to assert its rights against those of its parents.
4. In seeking to right abuses, the *Conventions of the Rights of the Child*, sponsored by the United Nations, gives children "rights" which undermine their own well-being:

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Paul Campos, professor of law at the University of Colorado. (2002), emphasis added.
http://www.religioustolerance.org/abo_when.htm, accessed 20090307.

- a) The convention considers the discipline of spanking a child, something which the Bible upholds as loving discipline, as "a serious violation of the dignity of the child."
 - b) The ability of parents to control what their children are exposed to—especially in relation to religious instruction—is also at risk.
 - c) Portions of the convention which deal with the rights of children have been interpreted to convey legal rights to the child against that of its parents.
5. To these wide-ranging rights we can add the ability of young girls in some states to obtain an abortion without parental consent.
6. Perhaps the ultimate example of blindness and foolish thinking is found in what we teach our children about where they came from—the world view with which they are indoctrinated in our schools.
- a) Children are indoctrinated with the view that mankind is the product of Darwinian evolution.
 - b) But what is this worldview really telling our young people? Let's listen as another "wise man" (a biology professor) explains the implications:
 - (1) Let me summarize my views on what modern evolutionary biology tells us loud and clear—and these are basically Darwin's views. There are no gods, no purposes, and no goal-directed forces of any kind. There is no life after death. When I die, I am absolutely certain that I am going to be dead. That's the end of me. There is no ultimate foundation for ethics, no ultimate meaning in life, and no free will for humans, either.⁵
 - c) After teaching children they are nothing but accidental pond scum in a world where "might makes right," is it really logical to then expect to teach them they are valuable and to motivate them to go out and "change the world"?
 - d) What has been the result of promoting the Darwinian world-view?
 - (1) Youth violence has escalated alarmingly while increasing numbers of our youth struggle with depression and thoughts of suicide.
 - e) For those who follow God and are not under the 'spell of foolishness' sweeping our nation, the result is completely to be expected:
 - (1) "As a nation we are teaching the next generation that we do not value human life either in the beginning (abortion and infanticide) or at the end (euthanasia). If we are teaching America's children that we do not value life at the beginning

⁵ Provine, W.B. 1994. *Origins Research*. 16 (1): 9 cited in Lawrence E. Ford, "Anchors Away", *Acts & Facts Magazine*, March 2009, 4-5, p. 5.

or end, what makes us think that somehow they will learn to value life anywhere in between?"⁶

- f) Yet how often have we seen "wise men" (in this case, psychologists), when interviewed on television following some heinous teen crime, express puzzlement and be at an almost complete loss to identify what has gone wrong?
- g) Is this not clear evidence of a growing futility of the mind among the wise of our nation?

VIII. Our Bankrupt Fiscal Policy

- A. Lastly, a brief look at our present fiscal situation and the solutions being proposed by our "wise men" (in this case leaders and politicians) provides yet more evidence that "our wisdom has become foolishness."
- B. The Bible has much to say about money and the godly and ungodly use of it.
- C. Several very simple principles are evident:
 - 1. A nation which is blessed by God—by following His principles—will find itself to be a lender to other nations. This principle is found in the explicit promise to bless Israel upon her obedience to God's law:
 - a) Deuteronomy 15:6
"For the LORD your God will bless you just as He promised you; you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow; you shall reign over many nations, but they shall not reign over you."
 - 2. Conversely, a nation which is cursed by God—having rejected His principles—will find itself to be a debtor to other nations. Again, the principle is most clearly stated in the specific curse given to Israel if she disobeyed God's law:
 - a) Deuteronomy 28:43-44
"The alien who [is] among you shall rise higher and higher above you, and you shall come down lower and lower. He shall lend to you, but you shall not lend to him; he shall be the head, and you shall be the tail."
 - 3. The Bible also has much to say about wise stewardship, saving, covetousness, and repaying on debt (e.g., Pr. 22:7; Ps. 37:21).
 - 4. Neither the Bible nor history knows of the prevailing philosophy now guiding the "wise men" of our financial institutions: *the idea that a person or nation can become prosperous through spending. Not just spending, but spending money one does not have!*
 - 5. Once again, the "wise men" (this time, economists) are unable to see the forest for the trees and are befuddled about how wealth is gained and lost. Phrases such as "supply-

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Normal Geisler and Peter Bocchino, *Unshakable Foundations* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2001). p. 203.

side spending” or “Keynesian economics” serve to mask the patently foolish notion that a nation can spend its way to prosperity.

6. The government wants to *spend* \$3.6 trillion dollars to *stimulate* the economy next year. But does anybody really understand what that means? According to one report:
 - a) If you spent \$1 million an hour, non-stop for 24 hours a day, you wouldn't run out of money for 411 years.
 - b) If you took 3.6 trillion one-dollar bills, and placed them end-to-end, that line of bills would reach from Capitol Hill to the sun and then back to Capitol Hill and then back to the sun — and then almost all the way back to Capitol Hill again.
 - c) 3.6 trillion dollars amounts to 1 out of every four dollars produced in the US in a given year
 - d) The 3.6 trillion dollars doesn't even include the \$700 billion in bank bailout money or the \$410 billion spending bill under consideration on Capitol Hill. That's another \$1.1 trillion.
- D. What is puzzling to many: *why is it that the average person on the street understands that spending huge amounts of tax dollars cannot be solution to insolvency yet the "wise men" of our nation seem unable or unwilling to recognize this simple truth?*
- E. Could it be that our nation has turned a corner? Could it be that we, like Edom, are being influenced by our own self-imposed curse brought about through our continued rejection of God—resulting in the erosion of our wisdom into foolishness?
- F. Isaiah described a similar time in Israel in the 59th chapter of his book:
 1. Isaiah 59:9-11
Therefore justice is far from us, Nor does righteousness overtake us; We look for light, but there is darkness! For brightness, [but] we walk in blackness! We grope for the wall like the blind, And we grope as if [we had] no eyes; We stumble at noonday as at twilight; [We are] as dead [men] in desolate places. We all growl like bears, And moan sadly like doves; We look for justice, but [there is] none; For salvation, [but] it is far from us.

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