

## OBADIAH - and the fall of Esau

The Hebrew name of this prophet means 'servant of the Lord', but he tells us nothing of his background or when he lived. His theme concerns the neighbouring kingdom of Edom (Esau), to the south of Israel. Esau was the twin of Jacob (later re-named Israel), and there was a perpetual rivalry between the two men and their descendants. King David conquered the people of Edom and brought them under tribute, but in later times they rebelled and became independent.

Esau's people were warriors, preferring the sword to the plough. When enemies attacked Judah, the Edomites waited in the wings like hyenas and plundered where they could. Their base in Mount Seir made them feel impregnable. But Obadiah warned that God was unhappy with their pride, and their savage treatment of their blood relatives. He would open up their mountain retreat to the enemy.

*"The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rock, in your lofty dwelling, who say in your heart, 'Who will bring me down to the ground?' Though you soar aloft like the eagle, though your nest is set among the stars, from there I will bring you down, declares the LORD. .... On the day that you stood aloof, on the day that strangers carried off his wealth and foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem, you were like one of them." So, he concludes, "Because of the violence done to your brother Jacob, shame shall cover you, and you shall be cut off forever." Obadiah 1:3, 4, 11 and 10*

History shows the truth of this prediction. At some point after Judah returned from captivity in Babylon, the Nabatean people invaded and took over the territory of Edom, and Esau's people disappeared for ever. The red rock temples and caves of Petra, popular on the Jordanian tourist trail, are monuments to their conquerors.

However, like all the prophets, Obadiah has a view of the time of the end. Esau, the red one, the man of the earth (in Hebrew 'Edom', 'Adam', 'red' and the word for 'soil' are similar) comes to represent man in his pride and rebellion against God. The prophet sees a Day of the Lord fall upon all nations. Like the Edomites centuries before, they will occupy Jerusalem, and drink to their success on God's holy hill. But "saviours shall go up to Mount Zion to rule Mount Esau", he concludes, "and the Kingdom shall be the Lord's" (verse 21).

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