

RELIGION

Scripture of the Week

Matthew, Chapter 7

Insight on the Word: The Tragic End of a Nation

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This week I'd like to use the question-and-answer approach to this lesson. Those who know me can tell you I prefer to answer questions whenever I teach, rather than just lecture or preach. I invented the questions, but I would welcome your comments or questions on the Bible at any time. Just write me c/o The Portland Observer.

The Bible text for our Sunday School classes this Sunday will be taken from the little Old Testament book of Obadiah, verses 1-4, 10-11, 15, 17, 21.

What are we doing in the book of Obadiah? Well, we are beginning a new series of studies in some of the most ignored books of the Bible, the "Minor Prophets." Over the next seven weeks we'll have the opportunity to dig into the prophecies of Obadiah, Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah.

Okay, but why should we care about these obscure little books, tucked away between Daniel and Matthew? The simplest answer may still be the best: these books have the clear mark of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit on them, and they are an essential part of God's message to humanity.

These books (except Jonah) are strange country to most people, even to Christians and Jews, who recognize them as the Word of God. Part of that is because we so seldom read them. And they are hard to understand today, because they refer to peoples and places and events which we may only vaguely remember from the Bible's books of history.

Do they still have any relevance to us today? Very much so. The prophets revealed the character of Yahweh (the Lord God) through the covenant relationship he instituted with the people

of Israel. And God's character never changes: he is a righteous and holy God, so he will insist on righteousness in his people and he will judge and condemn evildoers. But he is also a God of great mercy, ready to forgive and restore those who turn from their sins and surrender to his will.

Okay, so what about Obadiah? We don't know much for sure about Obadiah. His name means "Servant of Yahweh (the Lord)." He has been dated by some scholars as the earliest of the writing prophets, but others think he wrote about the time of the fall of Jerusalem, a contemporary of Jeremiah.

Obadiah's prophecy is only one chapter long, making this the shortest book in the Old Testament. That's why references to Obadiah have only verse numbers; we wouldn't write Obadiah 1:15, for example.

What did Obadiah write about? Obadiah had only one message: the destruction of the kingdom of Edom. Edom was located in the dry desert lands south and east of the Promised Land. They settled in the high cliffs east of the Arabah (the Rift Valley), and built a beautiful capital city, Petra, out of the rock of Mount Seir. They were successful herdsmen, despite the harsh climate. And their home commanded the major trade routes from Mesopotamia to Egypt and Arabia, so they were also well known as traders and (at times) as bandits.

The people of Edom claimed descent from Esau, the brother of Jacob. And Jacob was the ancestor of the nations of Israel and Judah. So these nations should have considered themselves brothers (note the language in verse 12).

So why did Obadiah want to see them destroyed? He may have had his

reasons, but that's not the point. No prophet spoke his own ideas on his own initiative, "but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21, NIV).

And the Lord had reasons to judge and condemn the nation of Edom. The city of Jerusalem had been under attack, and the nation Edom stood by and watched as their "brother" Israel was being ransacked (verse 11), and even rejoiced in it (v 12). As if that wasn't enough, they took advantage of the situation to rob Jerusalem themselves (v 13), and they rounded up the fugitives of the city and handed them over to Judah's enemies (v 14).

Why did Edom treat Jerusalem this way? These two nations had been at odds for hundreds of years, since the time of the Exodus. David had conquered Edom and added it to his kingdom, but they rebelled from Solomon. From then on, Edom hated Israel and Judah, and did everything they could to hurt their larger neighbors. (Read more on this history in a Bible dictionary, under "Edom.")

What was the Lord's predictions concerning Edom? In general, the Lord said that their defenses in the mountains would not protect them in the end (vv 3-4). They would be betrayed by their allies (v 7). There would be no survivors of Edom on Mount Seir (v 18), and their beautiful cities and fortresses would be taken over by another nation, out of the desert (v 19). Finally, the remnant of Edom would be ruled from Jerusalem (v 21).

Did these things come to pass? They sure did. After Edom had helped Babylon conquer Judah and Jerusalem, the Babylonian king turned on Edom and attacked them and weakened them. Later the Nabateans (an Arab people)

drove the Edomites out of Seir and took all their land. The rest of the Edomites, called Idumeans, settled in the southern fringe of Judea (the Negev) just prior to the time of Christ.

Herod the Great (Matthew 2) was an Idumean, and under Roman patronage he ruled as King of the Jews. But after the fall of Jerusalem, even these Idumeans disappeared from the pages of history.

What does all this mean for us today? There are two main truths that Obadiah emphasized in his prophecy. First, Yahweh is in control of the whole earth. There is only one God, and he is Lord over all. Though we should tolerate other religions, even those who worship other gods, that doesn't mean all religions are equally valid and true. There is a real Creator and Sustainer of the earth, and he proves who he is through many means, including these prophecies about the nations.

How could Obadiah have foreseen the fall of Edom, unless Yahweh God had spoken through him, and had the power to fulfill his judgment?

Second, the Lord does judge all the nations according to their works (v 15). Every people stand in judgment for their deeds as a people, both now and in the final "day of the Lord" (Matthew 25:31-32).

Even the United States—and every people that live here—will stand in judgment before their Creator. And even now we see signs of judgment falling on this nation, as a result of our sins of hatred, exploitation, materialistic greed, obsession with pleasure and lust, and others. As a nation, and as various ethnic groups within this nation, we need to turn our hearts to God in true repentance, while there is still time. The tragedy which fell on Edom doesn't have to fall on us as well.

In Loving Memory of Anna Ruth Mosley

September 7, 1951 - May 12, 1992

sister-in-law:

Anna Ruth Mosley is the daughter of Robert and Annie L. Mosley. She was born September 7, 1951, in Carthage, Mississippi.

Anna is the mother of Robert L. Mosley, III, and Christopher T.J. Mosley.

Anna is the beloved sister of Robert L. Mosley, Jr., Denise Parker, Aaron G. Mosley, Daphne L. Mosley, and Heather R. Mosley.

Anna grew up with her brothers and sisters, attended Highland Grade School and Jefferson High School in Portland, Oregon.

Anna had a great deal of love to share and found favor with people. She was always willing to listen to your problems and offer advice, and never burden you with hers. Anna was not selfish; she would give you her very last. Anna had problems of her own but she kept them to herself.



Services were held at Emmanuel Temple Full Gospel Pentecostal Church 1032 N. Sumner Portland, Oregon May 20, 1992 1:00 P.M. To Anna, my beloved

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Psalms 34:3

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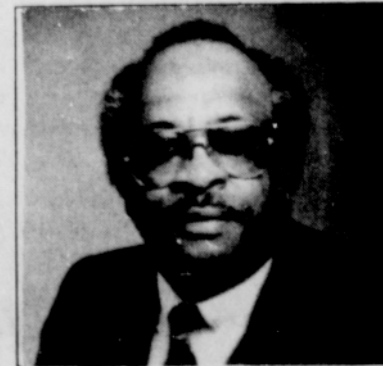
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Theme: Whatever you're going to do for the Lord, do it now

I Peter 4:11