

Text: Genesis 36  
Title: "This is Edom"  
Time: 5/17/09 am  
Place: NBBC

Introduction: As a History major in college, I was lead by my teachers to believe that history is an important subject. Perhaps you can remember a history teacher who tried to convince you of its importance at a time in your life when everything important seemed to be in the present or in the future.

I have in my library two volumes called *The Lincoln Library of Essential Information*. It is nice in our age of endless information to have two handy volumes that tell me what the essential things are. Volume I has a section on history, and it defines the importance of knowing history this way:

"To study history is to live over again this story of the past, to meet familiarly great men and notable women, and to see the outcome of their actions more clearly than the actors saw it themselves. It is to have at one's disposal authentic facts about the past. More than this, the reading of history enlarges our experience, and enables us to judge of present issues and to forecast the future of situations through our knowledge of similar situations in the past. For these reasons, history is a study of the utmost importance for every one, and especially for citizens of a democracy, who have to make up their minds about issues of government, in order that they may help to determine public policies and actions."

For Moses, the author of Genesis 36, and his first readers, the children of Israel that had come from Egypt with him in the Exodus, the history of Edom would have been very pertinent information. Num. 20:14-21 tells us that the nation of Edom was a suspicious and defensive obstacle for the nation of Israel as they made their way to the land of God's promise. That generation had already failed to trust the Lord at Kadesh, and

God had condemned them to wander in the wilderness until a new generation could be raised up to be led into the land of promise. Edom's obstinacy helped to ensure that the wandering in the wilderness would be a long one. Perhaps related to the importance of these current events, Moses wanted his readers to know who Edom was. The theme of Genesis 36 is very simply "This is Edom" (vv. 1, 8-9, 19, 43).

So why might we, 21st century Americans, need to be told this morning that "this is Edom"? Well, if nothing else, Genesis 36 tells us that it is not only the generations of Jacob that are important to the Lord (37:2); the generations of Esau are important too. The Old Testament is not just about Israel, it is also about God's dealing with Edom and other countries as well. In fact, in terms of biblical theology, the nation of Edom is a kind of representative Gentile nation – the brother of Israel, whom God did not chose for the line of the promised descendant.

We see this in prophetic passages like Obad. 1:10-15. There the address to Edom becomes a warning for "all nations" about the day of the Lord. So when we read a chapter entitled, "This is Edom," we read a chapter that characterizes a nation that may be very much like our own. The residents of Edom were undoubtedly very much like you and I. I want us to understand three things about the nation of Edom this morning.

I. Edom's founder knew the Lord (vv. 1-8).

Illustration: I can remember being told a number of times as a kid that the apple never falls far from the tree. People who told me that were, of course, indicating that they thought that I was a lot like my Dad.

Application: Esau grew up in the home of the godly patriarch Isaac. Father and son were very close. The Scripture is clear that Esau had his problems, but so did Jacob. Without a

special work of God in their lives, neither of these men could have been described as founders who knew the Lord.

So does Scripture indicate that Esau ever came to know the Lord? I think that there is evidence of this in the passage we just read (vv. 6-7), as well as in chapters 32-33, in which Jacob and Esau are reunited after their long separation. Two verses from those chapters especially shed some significant light on the timing of the verse we have before us here (32:3, 33:16).

Clearly, the move to Seir that we read about in chapter 36 actually happened long before the return of Jacob to his father Isaac. In addition, the move was not an easy one for Esau (Deut. 2:22). Yet the blessing of God was on Esau's move. He moved away because he had come to the conclusion that in the will of God, what belonged to his father in Canaan now belonged to his brother. The birthright and blessing were Jacob's, not as a travesty of justice, but as an act of God's will. Esau had found forgiveness and peace with not only his brother Jacob, but also with his brother Jacob's God long before Jacob returned from Padanaram. Esau was by no means perfect, but he was a man who, having grown up in Isaac's home, had found the saving faith of his fathers in the Lord.

Illustration: Like Edom, America is a land with founders who were not all perfect in their theology, nor all spotless in their example, but who were in large measure God-fearing men. Listen to the Thanksgiving Proclamation our first president, George Washington, issued in 1789:

"Whereas it is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits, and humbly to implore His protection and favor; and Whereas both Houses of Congress have, by their joint committee, requested me 'to recommend to the people of the United States a day of public thanksgiving and prayer, to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many

and signal favors of Almighty God, especially by affording them an opportunity peaceably to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness': Now, therefore, I do recommend and assign Thursday, the 26th day of November next, to be devoted by the people of these States to the service of that great and glorious Being who is the beneficent author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be; that we may then all unite in rendering unto Him our sincere and humble thanks for His kind care and protection of the people of this country previous to their becoming a nation; for the signal and manifold mercies and the favorable interpositions of His providence in the course and conclusion of the late war; for the great degree of tranquility, union, and plenty which we have since enjoyed; for the peaceable and rational manner in which we have been enabled to establish constitutions of government for our safety and happiness, and particularly the national one now lately instituted for the civil and religious liberty with which we are blessed, and the means we have of acquiring and diffusing useful knowledge; and, in general, for all the great and various favors which He has been pleased to confer upon us. And also that we may then unite in most humbly offering our prayers and supplications to the great Lord and Ruler of Nations and beseech Him to pardon our national and other transgressions; to enable us all, whether in public or private stations, to perform our several and relative duties properly and punctually; to render our National Government a blessing to all the people by constantly being a Government of wise, just, and constitutional laws, discreetly and faithfully executed and obeyed; to protect and guide all sovereigns and nations (especially such as have shown kindness to us), and to bless them with good governments, peace, and concord; to promote the knowledge and practice of true religion and virtue, and the increase of science among them and us; and, generally to grant unto all mankind such a degree of temporal prosperity as He alone knows to be best."

This is an understanding very far removed from the one that prohibited any participation in the national day of prayer a few weeks back in the White House. It may be true today that America is not a Christian nation, but in the days that made her great she surely was. She had founders, many of whom knew the Lord.

II. Edom possessed God-ordained leadership (vv. 15, 31, 40).

Illustration: Critics of the veracity of Scripture claim that Moses could not have written a verse like verse 31. They base this criticism on the assumption that Moses would not have known about Israel's kings because he lived far too early for that. We know better, of course, because we have taken the time to read chapters 1-35 as the words of Moses before getting to chapter 36. Moses knew that kings were coming to Israel, because they had been part of the promise to Abraham and to Jacob. But here, Moses makes the point that long before God bestowed this gift on His people, He did so on the nation of Edom. The leadership of Edom teaches us some things about the civil governments we live under.

A. Civil government is a God-ordained blessing (Rom. 13:1-7).

Illustration: The Old Coach baseball fields out by the dump have a new parking lot open now across the road. As I pulled up for my practice on Friday, I decided that I was still going to use that spot next to the field by the road that everyone always used to park, because my big black bag of bats and helmets is too heavy to carry in from across the road.

Well, as I was performing my coaching duties, one of New Boston's fine police officers stopped and informed our team that whoever owned the white van needed to move it to the new parking lot. He did not give me a ticket, but I suppose he could have. There was something in my flesh that said that it would have been a very disappointing and irritating thing if

he had given me a ticket. My assistant coach is a police officer in Londonderry, so I have to be careful about that kind of impulse to keep peace on my team. But more importantly, I need to resist that fleshly impulse to keep peace with the Lord. The police officer asking me to move my car is actually working for Him. So I interrupted my practice and moved my van.

Application: We need to maintain a testimony before the world that tells people that we know that God is in charge of civil governments, and that the authority that they possess was entrusted to them by Him.

B. Civil government blesses best when people are free.

Application: Did you notice that the kings of Edom were not dynastic kings? Evidently, these were charismatic leaders chosen by the people to lead by virtue of the gifts and abilities they brought to the need of the hour. They were likely far more like the judges of Israel than the kings of Israel. The transition from judges to dynastic kings was an unhappy one for Israel (1 Sam. 8:7-18). The absolute power of civil government over the life of a nation is something that robs people of their freedom. People want this kind of government in their lives when they lose faith in God to meet their needs.

Illustration: Many Americans today have forgotten how to love freedom. Our state motto guards against this: "Live free or die." But for many today, the motto is an unpopular thing. I had the chance to accompany my kids' classes down to the national park of Lexington and Concord and the midnight ride of Paul Revere. The British redcoats had marched to Concord to take out a weapons stash that their spies had warned them about. Revere and his comrades rode to warn the towns that they were coming, and the townspeople were waiting with guns to defend their property. Shots were fired that ignited a minute man assault on the retreating British line all the way back to Boston.

One colonial we learned about walked for six days from New Haven, CT to come shoot a redcoat who was trying to take his freedom away. We need to remember how to love freedom, and that may mean that we are willing to depend more on God and less on government for our personal well-being.

III. Edom faced a decision every Gentile must face (Amos 9:11-15; Acts 15:12-21).

Application: Acts 15 tells us exactly what this decision is: "So that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord" (v. 17). The decision that faces all of mankind is, "Are you going to seek the Lord, Israel's God?"

Now you are probably still wondering what this has to do with Edom. Well, the passage James quotes in Acts 15 is actually a passage that mentions Edom in Amos 9. As we noted earlier in Obadiah, here in this poetic and prophetic passage, Edom is the representative of all the Gentile nations (v. 12). Just like Esau had to decide what he was going to do with Jacob, and just like Edom had to decide throughout its history what it was going to do with her sister-nation Israel, so also all mankind, every individual in our day and age, has a decision to make about the significance of what Amos calls the restoration of the fallen booth of David.

James teaches in Acts 15 that this booth of David is the restored shell of Israel that was raised up so that the Messiah could come and fulfill the law in our behalf and then die for the sins of sinners. This was done so that all mankind might seek Him, the Lord who died for their sins. We are today's Edom; you are Esau, and you must decide what you are going to do with your brother Jesus Christ, the God-man who died for your sins.

Conclusion: Will you seek Him today? The Lord made this plan known long before it transpired, and this may be the first

time you are hearing of it. God restored enough Judaism in the land of Palestine so that Christ could come and save His people from their sins. Amos tells us that now the rest of mankind, all the nations, you and I can seek the Lord, the Messiah promised the Jews, Jesus Christ. If you seek Him, He will be found by you.

It was the testimony of Paul and Barnabas at that Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 that many Gentiles had found Him. It is the testimony of our church family that we have found him. Have you found Him? If not, today can be the day. Peter tells us exactly how in Acts 15:10-11: "Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they." Believe through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and you too shall be saved.

"A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction—the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*