

Younger and Older
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Obad 21

(BHS)

וְעָלוּ מוֹשְׁעִים בְּהַר צִיּוֹן
לְשַׁפֵּט אֶת־הַר עִשָּׂו
וְהָיְתָה לַיהוָה הַמְּלוּכָה:

(NIV)

Deliverers will go up on Mount Zion
to govern the mountains of Esau.
And the kingdom will be the LORD's.

Mount Zion is straightforward. “Deliverers,” or “saviors,” is from *yasha'*, from which the name “Jesus” is derived. Mountains of Esau should also be readily identifiable. In fact, this is all first year vocab.

In Gen 25:23, Rebekah was told that her twins (Esau and Jacob) would become two nations (Edom and Israel), and the older would serve the younger. The Hebrew for “serve” is *'abad* as in “Obad-iah”—“servant of Yahweh.” The name of the prophet Obadiah, then, introduces the concept of serving. In our verse, Obadiah foresees the ultimate state of affairs when Edom will serve Israel—Jacob shall rule over Esau. But the path to this was slow in coming.

If you remember, Jacob stole Esau’s blessing and fled. Much later he returned with his wives and sons and flocks. Humanly speaking, they were all he had. But Esau came at him with 400 armed men (Gen 33:1)! Jacob humbled himself before Esau. But what about the promise that Esau would serve Jacob?

Take a look now at Genesis 36, which gives us perspective on the fortunes of Esau’s people. By the way, Edom is closely related to Seir (see v9).

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Esau is the progenitor of nations and kings! And look at v31, “These are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom, before any king reigned over the Israelites.” But Jacob went down to Egypt with only about 70 people. What has become of the promise that the older would serve the younger?

Esau is the poster boy for the family member who almost understands spiritual things, but just didn’t get it. He sold his birthright, but pursued his father’s blessing later with tears. Sometimes the Bible hints that Edom shared some Yahwist traditions. Yahweh comes from Seir (Deut 33:2, Judg 5:4). Jethro (from around there) served Yahweh too (Exod 18:12). Yahweh seems perfectly comfortable in the mountains south of Israel. See also Deut 23:7 – 8, where Edomites are included in the congregation of Yahweh. It is as if the Edomites had knowledge of Abraham and Isaac’s faith, yet did not have the living presence of God working his redemptive purposes in and through them.

Is there anyone in your family who seems that God hasn’t done a work in their life yet? Who go through the motions of religious things, without genuine inner animation of the Spirit? Part of what you can get out of the story of Esau and Jacob is the difference between family members who are called and those who just don’t get it. Maybe you have come to faith and everyone else is unbelieving. Anyway, what has become of Obadiah’s prophecy that saviors from the younger son would govern the older?

Eventually, David conquered Edom. They gained independence again under Jehoram, and “To this day Edom has been in rebellion against Judah” (2 Kings 8:20 – 22).

Babylon finally destroyed Edom as a nation. Judah followed soon after. Their lands didn't revive economically or politically until the Hellenistic era. Was that it for the promise that the younger would rule the older?

Centuries later, the land of Edom was inhabited by people called Idumeans (say, "Edom-eans"). One Idumean family converted to Judaism, and from them one man rose to rule Palestine. The Magi asked him, "Where is he who was born King of the Jews?" Apparently the aged Idumean king had competition. Would he serve the baby Messiah? All his life, Herod wanted to be accepted as a true Jew, but never really was—like Esau pursuing his inheritance to no avail. Jesus was the younger son destined to rule all—and to be called King of Israel instead of megalomaniacal Herod.

When you waver, doubt, or think that everyone else gets what they want except you, remember the Israelites tormented by Edom in the book of Obadiah. Remember also that the promises of God really point to Jesus and the fact that he will reign forever. You just can't look at your present circumstances and find in them the consummate fulfillment of God's promises. Rather, the thought you need to hold on to is that someday you will be caught up with Jesus in glory.

Also, remember that if there is strife in your family for the sake of Christ, this is part and parcel of what it means to be a Christian.

Bring the Day quickly, Lord Jesus!