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## A Study of the Ancient Edomites: An Examination of the Civilization of the Nation of Edom and Its Relationship to Israel

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A STUDY OF THE ANCIENT EDMITES:  
AN EXAMINATION OF THE CIVILIZATION  
OF THE NATION OF EDM  
AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO ISRAEL

by

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THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Master of Arts degree  
Wilfrid Laurier University  
1974

UMI Number: EC56485

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"ABSTRACT"

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AN EXAMINATION OF THE CIVILIZATION  
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DAVID T. LYON

This study attempts to analyze the history of the nation and kingdom of Edom. The author relates Edomite history through the lens of biblical criticism and available historical, geographical, sociological, and archaeological analyses. The Edomite relationship to ancient Israel is examined in an attempt to bring into focus much of the long forgotten and ignored history of Edom.

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PREFACE

Like many works of this kind, this thesis began as a sort of accident. In the course of examination of the history of ancient Israel it became clearly evident that a lack of data was available concerning the nation and culture of Edom. Certainly almost any comprehensive history of Israel contains a section or chapter on the nation of Edom. However, very few documents, books, or articles exist that speak directly to the situation that was present in the nation of Edom. And likewise, surprisingly little is to be found concerning the relationship between Edom and her better known neighbour and rival, Israel. Even when articles and books are located, they proved often to be somewhat outdated and therefore limited in their usefulness.

A scrutinization of the historical developments surrounding the rise in power and prestige of the Israelite monarchy under David and Solomon will reveal the considerable role that was played in that phenomenon by the Edomites. Despite this relatively important position, it seems almost as if historians have all but ignored the history of Edom. Archaeological evidence is also rather slim. In the 1930's an expedition under the late Nelson Glueck explored eastern Palestine but attempted few large scale excavations. The data collected on that expedition is available and is most helpful. One must, however, note

with caution that the information is now nearly forty years old. In recent years some of the work of Crystal M. Bennett has focused upon the general area of the nation of Edom. Unfortunately, very little of this data is currently in print and the author is understandably reluctant to let it pass from her hands.

As a result of these singularly distressing facts, a study or examination of the culture and history of the nation of Edom can prove more than slightly frustrating. Much of the work of this thesis came about as a direct result of the advice and guidance of Dr. Lawrence E. Toombs. When details were lacking, Dr. Toombs often provided solutions or suggestions to fill the gaps. His assistance in offering possible areas of investigation has proven invaluable.

The direct stimulus for this thesis came about as a result of participation in the Joint Archaeological Expedition to Tell el-Hesi in the summer of 1971. The site is located in an area of modern Israel that would very possibly have been occupied by the westward expansion of the Edomites during the Persian (587 to 330 b.c.e.) and the Hellenistic (330 to 63 b.c.e.) periods. The lack of available data concerning the Edomites proved at times to be a handicap for the staff of the expedition as they attempted to sort out and record the various occupational levels. As the excavation progressed, it seemed more

and more clearly evident that additional information concerning Edom and the Edomites would greatly assist the efforts of the staff. This thesis is a small effort to attempt to fill that informational gap.

The author would also like to express his appreciation for the patience and assistance of his wife, Paula Fitzmartin Lyon, in the preparation of the several drafts and manuscripts of this thesis.

All biblical quotations are taken from the Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted.



THE TASK

One faces several important problems when undertaking an investigation of the culture and history of the nation of Edom. The foremost of these problems is the lack of data currently available. Because of either a lack of interest or a lack of ambition, little original information in the form of archaeological reports or even geographical surface reports has been recently published. This shortage of original source material can serve to frustrate even the most dedicated scholar. A second problem one encounters is the age of the reports, studies, and treatises that are available. One of the finest examples of this phenomenon is the excellent work on eastern Palestine by Nelson Glueck.<sup>1</sup> One must, of course, be wary of any archaeological report, regardless of its source, that is nearly forty years old. Another major work on Edom was undertaken by George Livingston Robinson.<sup>2</sup> However, it too is about forty years old. The danger in placing too much faith in these reports is inherent. Just like people, ideas and scholarship change when new facts are brought forth. And although we can surely benefit from the observations of Glueck and Robinson, we must approach

<sup>1</sup>Nelson Glueck, "Explorations in Eastern Palestine," The Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research, Volumes XV, XVIII-XIX, 1934-35, 1937-39, (New Haven, 1935, 1939).

<sup>2</sup>George Livingston Robinson, The Sarcophagus of an Ancient Civilization, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1930).

with a good deal of caution many of their conclusions and suggestions.

There is, however, a kind of bright spot behind the cloud created by these several important problems. Because few hard and cold facts can be found regarding Edom, one is not burdened with an overabundance of material and data. Unlike many fields which are seemingly cluttered with the remains of ill-conceived scholarly theories, the study of the ancient civilization of the Edomites remains relatively untouched. It can, therefore, be intellectually stimulating to speculate as to the significance and importance of the available data. But one is not obliged to argue against or in favour of many conflicting thoughts, theories, and ideas. When discussing Edom, one can digest the thoughts and arguments of several important scholars and sift through the facts and hopefully arrive at a well reasoned and thoughtful set of conclusions. This set of conclusions need not be congruent with the ideas and conclusions of the handful of experts who have dealt with the topic in years past. Such is the case with the present work.

Naturally dangers are involved when little hard data exists in any field. It becomes sometimes easy to leap to incorrect conclusions. One can fall into the trap of exercising an overactive imagination. Hopefully the author has avoided this dangerous but common scholarly

pitfall. So then there are both rewards and dangers involved in investigating a somewhat new field of study. Hopefully with an appreciation of the dangers we can move forward with the hope of genuine accomplishment and the attractiveness of perhaps examining old theories with and through the lens of modern methods and approaches to both archaeology and history.

While we have noted with regret that little recent data is available concerning Edom from an archaeological perspective, we can note with some satisfaction and pleasure that a fair amount of new work has been done on the book of Obadiah. Leading the way in these recent investigations is an excellent study undertaken by John D. W. Watts.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the work of John A. Thompson has become something of a standard reference in less than twenty years.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps these works, combined with some of the older studies and commentaries on Obadiah can assist our investigation of the nation of Edom. Is it perhaps possible to gain new insights into the history of Edom and its relationship to Israel and Judah through an examination of the works on Obadiah? For many years the book of Obadiah was looked upon as something of a curiosity piece. The shortest book of the Old Testament,

<sup>3</sup>John D. W. Watts, Obadiah: A Critical Exegetical Commentary, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1969).

<sup>4</sup>John A. Thompson, The Book of Obadiah (The Interpreter's Bible, Volume 6), (Nashville: The Abingdon Press, 1956).

containing but one chapter, Obadiah seemed concerned only with a violent harangue against the nation and people of Edom. Scholars have debated for decades whether Obadiah is actually describing historical events or simply using a vivid imagination in his descriptions and accounts. One of the functions of this presentation is to attempt to investigate the nation of Edom by examining the prophetic book of Obadiah. Hopefully by using this kind of back door approach, we can gain some new insights about Edom by using recent commentaries on Obadiah.

And in addition to scrutinizing Obadiah we shall also glance critically at other relevant biblical passages. However, as much as possible this investigation of Edom will restrict itself to key biblical passages relating directly to Edom and her people. It is important to note that the author is not attempting a critical exegetical study of biblical references to Edom. The author is attempting to gather the available facts concerning Edom and present those facts in a straightforward manner so as to assist those involved in a modern archaeological investigation or expedition. In a sense this thesis is a synthesis of available data, as well as a reassessment of that data. This thesis is primarily concerned with Edom, the people known as the Edomites, and the culture and historical background which moulded the life of a

people. We shall naturally be concerned with Israel and Judah during periods when these two nations engaged in warfare, as well as in times of peace, with Edom. It is both unwise and useless to investigate the history of a nation without touching upon the history of that nation's neighbours. No country lives or evolves out of a vacuum. And in addition, a great volume of material exists concerning the history of Edom's great neighbour, Israel. We can learn a good deal about Edom by examining what the historians and theologians and prophets of Israel had to say about Edom and her people. In short, we shall attempt to put forth a kind of history of Edom with the details and facts that are available to us. We must be content to note that many fine and dependable tools do not in themselves make a fine craftsman. The important feature is how the craftsman employs the tools with which he has to work.

THE BIBLICAL BEGINNINGS OF EDOM

The Old Testament account of the beginnings of Edom is strongly linked with the story of Jacob and Esau in Genesis 25:19-34. This account commences with a listing of the descendants of Isaac, the son of Abraham. When Isaac was forty years of age he took a wife, Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean. Unfortunately, Rebekah encountered difficulty in bearing children. After much concern and prayer, Rebekah finally conceived and bore two sons. Prior to birth the Lord had spoken to Rebekah telling her that within her womb were two nations, two divided people. The text goes on to explain that Yahweh noted to Rebekah that the two nations would not be equal, but that the elder would come to serve the younger. Rebekah delivered her two sons. The elder was named Esau and the younger was named Jacob. The text notes that while Jacob was a quiet man, dwelling mostly in the settlement, his brother, Esau, was a man of the wild, a highly skillful hunter.

Scholars have long debated the significance of the names of the twin brothers. Most students of this period seem to agree that Jacob was so named because he was born clinging to the heel of his older brother. The Hebrew people seem to have taken delight in giving their children symbolic names. Jacob (  $\text{יַעֲקֹב}$  ) is remarkably similar to the noun for heel (  $\text{עֲקֵב}$  ). In other words, some

commentators have theorized that Jacob was so named because of his connection with the heel of his brother at the time of birth. However, there are those who take exception to this particular interpretation. Cuthbert A. Simpson seems to indicate that he feels this interpretation to be overly simplistic as he notes that the name of Jacob,

appears as a component of a Palestinian place name, Jacob-el, in the lists of Thutmose III, dating from the fifteenth century, some time before the entry of Israel into the land. Whether Jacob-el means "God overreaches" or "Jacob is God" is uncertain. In any case, there can be no doubt that the name Jacob is derived from the pre-Israelite tradition of Canaan.<sup>1</sup>

Simpson goes on to theorize that the story of the birth of Jacob and Esau had nothing originally to do with Isaac and Rebekah. He claims that the story of the birth of the twin boys was a common and widespread account and a kind of explanation of the origins of the conflict and struggle between the people of Israel and Edom. Simpson notes that the story had its foundations to the east of the Jordan River.<sup>2</sup>

Gerhard von Rad looks upon the name of Jacob as a kind of ancient word game, a form of linguistic gymnastics. Von Rad notes that perhaps the name implies that

<sup>1</sup>Cuthbert A. Simpson, The Book of Genesis (The Interpreter's Bible, Volume 1), (Nashville: The Abingdon Press, 1956), pg. 665.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

Jacob, having grasped his brother's heel within the womb, was already disputing his brother's birthright.

Von Rad goes on to explain,

The statement derives the name, Jacob, from the word heel (  $\text{אָקָל}$  ) in an audacious etymology and thus reveals an unusual self-irony. This interpretation almost makes things worse, for it is not to be supposed that the real meaning of the originally theophoric name was forgotten at the time (  $\text{אָקָל}$  probably means "may God protect").<sup>3</sup>

However heated the debate, we can safely leave the discussion of the meaning and derivation of Jacob's name because we are, of course, primarily concerned with the brother of Jacob, Esau, and the meaning and derivation of his name.

The etymology of Esau's name is no less confusing than that of his brother. In Genesis 25:25 we read that because Esau (  $\text{אֶשָׂו}$  ) came forth from the womb in a red (  $\text{אָדָם}$  ) condition, as well as being hairy (  $\text{שָׁרְשָׁרִים}$  ), his name was a derivation of these conditions. However, there appears to be some confusion over the textual reference. It seems evident that the redness of Esau at the time of his birth is a play on the word Edom (  $\text{אֶדוֹם}$  ). Certainly the Hebrew word for hairy is more closely related to the name Esau. However, the relationship is a bit strained. Many commentators have noted that hairy

<sup>3</sup>Gerhard von Rad, Genesis, (London: SCM Press, 1961), pg. 260.



(  $\text{רִי־שֵׁן}$  ) notation is perhaps more closely related to Seir, a large mountain mass located in the land of Edom. Therefore the play seems a bit misplaced with hairy (  $\text{רִי־שֵׁן}$  ) playing off of Seir (  $\text{רִי־שֵׁן}$  ) and red (  $\text{חִטְלִי}$  ) serving to work off of Edom (  $\text{חִטְלִי}$  ). Simpson has perhaps further confused the matter when he argues that the name Esau may be identified with the Phoenician Ousoos, who was a hero of the chase.<sup>4</sup> And thus Ousoos would be closely tied with the hunting skills of Esau.

The Genesis account continues to explain the variation in the attitudes and life styles of the two brothers. In Genesis 25:27 Esau is described as a very skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a comparatively quiet fellow who lived in tents. Personifying two very different ways of life, it is not surprising that the two brothers eventually came into conflict. Esau's descendants, the text implies, took on characteristics of their forefather in that they became primarily hunters and nomads whereas Jacob's descendants were tent dwellers and presumably shepherds. We must note with caution and appreciation that the Genesis account is attempting to provide background and answers to how the two nations of Edom and Israel came to be, as well as how they were created. The text is explaining the

<sup>4</sup>Simpson, pg. 665.

background for the relationship between the two nations. It is well worth noting that the government of Edom seems to have developed well before that of Israel. The text must deal with this dilemma. It does so by implying that Esau was a skillful hunter, an aggressive individual, and a highly independent person. These positive qualities were offset by Esau's impetuous nature and his lack of patience. These various qualities would fit well into Edom's development. The kingdom of Edom developed well before Israel. It, however, seems to have stagnated culturally, according to Simpson.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, we have the personality of Jacob. He was quiet and very thoughtful. He lived in tents and settlements and was something of a nomad. However, he was slightly devious or tricky and took advantage of the weakness of his less patient and thoughtful brother. These qualities of Jacob would seem to fit well into the history and development of Israel, which progressed slowly from a nomadic existence into a kind of peasantry and finally into a kingdom and a nation. In short, the text gives us a sort of picture of why and how Israel came to be dominant over her neighbour and brother, Edom. Israel, the descendants of Jacob were a bit more clever, a bit more self-controlled, and a bit more provident than was Edom, the descendants of Esau.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pg. 667.

The author of this section of the book of Genesis, the Yahwist, felt it necessary to explain the historical events of his day by explaining the events that came before him. Naturally the Israelites and the Edomites carried on an almost daily system of contacts. Their civilizations and nations bordered upon one another. But because of their inherent differences, as explained by the Yahwist through Jacob and Esau, they would just naturally be in a state of conflict.

It is perhaps curious that the Yahwist does not see fit to prejudice in any dramatic manner the account in favour of either Esau or Jacob. Curiously, neither twin takes on a very heroic stature in the Yahwist account. The characters are certainly not idealized. Indeed, often it seems as if the Yahwist is attempting to emphasize their ridiculous and foolish qualities. Otherwise the facts, as the Yahwist perceives them, are presented and left to stand for themselves and for the reader without much commentary. Perhaps oddly, Esau is depicted as the favourite of his father, Isaac, while Jacob seems to be his mother's favourite.<sup>6</sup> The reason given for Isaac's preference of Esau seems most queer. Genesis 25:28 notes that Isaac preferred Esau because he ate of his game. Von Rad suggests that perhaps this comment be considered from the humourous viewpoint with

<sup>6</sup>Note Genesis 25:28.

the resulting humour being lost for modern readers.<sup>7</sup> However, the entire account seems remarkably sober and realistic with the Yahwist adhering rather closely to the straightforward description of what he views to be the facts and the events.

However, despite the Yahwist's attempts at objectivity, some subtle kinds of prejudice do appear in the text. Jacob more often appears orderly and controlled, as well as respectable. The Yahwist depicts Jacob as an upstanding citizen who is concerned with the welfare of the community. It is significant that the adjective

□𐤓 is used to describe Jacob. □𐤓 can be defined as whole, complete, perfect, simple, pious, innocent, sincere, or mild.<sup>8</sup> In Genesis 25:27 we find Jacob described as □𐤓. This description conjures up an individual who would surely benefit the community with his solidarity and respectability. This description of Jacob can be contrasted with the character of Esau which is described as red, hairy, a bit wild, and surely foolhardy. The action of Esau in selling his birthright for a meal is certainly not the procedure of an orderly, sensitive, and sensible man. Such an action would not have

<sup>7</sup> von Rad, pg. 261.

<sup>8</sup> The Revised Standard Version of the Bible translates "quiet" while the King James Version employs "plain." The New English Version simply states that Jacob led a settled life.

seemed impressive to the Israelites. Generally the Yahwist demonstrates his preference for the way of life of Jacob, the shepherd, over that of Esau, the hunter.

We can now turn our attention to the highlight of the story of Jacob and Esau, the selling of the birthright.<sup>9</sup> This brief narrative seems to be the key to the textual beginnings of the nation of Edom. In the story the Yahwist is attempting to explain the reason for the separation of the two brothers and how that separation resulted in the creation of the nations of Israel and Edom. Having returned from the hunt, Esau is famished. He approaches his brother, Jacob and requests a portion of Jacob's pottage (verse 30). The craftiness of Jacob is now revealed as he begins to strike a bargain with his hungry brother. Jacob offers to share his meal if his brother will barter his birthright. Believing that he is about to die of starvation, Esau concludes that a birthright is of no value to a dead person. He therefore consents to the arrangement after Jacob, ever wary, extracts an oath from Esau. Finally Jacob permits his brother to eat of the meal of bread, lentils, and pottage. The short but important passage ends with Esau departing the scene and despising his birthright. The story reveals much about the Yahwist's impression and feelings about

<sup>9</sup>The narrative is found in Genesis 25:29-34.

the two brothers. One is struck once again with the pervasive feeling of realism of the narrative. There seems to be very little idealization of the characters and the plot is straightforward and to the point. The contrast between the two characters is vivid from the outset. The Yahwist makes it clear that the hunters' way of life is relatively unstable. Esau has returned from an unsuccessful hunt. He has not eaten in some time and believes himself to be on the verge of starvation. On the other hand, Jacob, who lives the life of the shepherd is a bit more stable. Von Rad comments that a man in Jacob's position seems more economic and careful than a man in Esau's position.<sup>10</sup> Jacob is clearly concerned with the future while his brother is depicted as being concerned primarily with the immediate situation. In bargaining away his birthright Esau seems shortsighted, callous, and even a bit stupid. However, Jacob does not impress the reader with his sense of fair play and his sense of brotherliness. The Yahwist's realistic description of the account does not place Jacob in a particularly favourable light when one notes that he refused to share his meal with his starving brother but instead wheedled a bargain from Esau.

Commentators have long noted Esau's callousness and stupidity in striking such a short-sighted bargain.

<sup>10</sup>von Rad, pg. 261.

However, perhaps Jacob was also guilty of unfairly tricking Esau. We can imagine Esau bursting into camp and immediately spying Jacob's boiling dinner pot. Esau describes the food in rather unclear and clumsy terms as he refers to it as "some of that red pottage" in verse 30. The Yahwist notes clearly that Esau is here furnishing himself with another appellation, Edom (  $\square\dot{\tau}\aleph$  ), which is identical in consonants to the Hebrew noun red (  $\square\dot{\tau}\aleph$  ). The story seems to indicate that Esau is somewhat uncertain just what food Jacob is preparing in the pot. Or perhaps Esau assumed the food, which was red in colour, to be a kind of rich meat soup that would, of course, be a deep red or brown. However, when he discovered that the food contained no meat he had already struck a bargain. To Esau's dismay he discovered that the food was made of lentils<sup>11</sup> and contained no meat. This trick of Jacob's could serve to explain Esau's assertion in Genesis 27:36 that Jacob had deceived him twice. The first deception would have been the selling of the birthright and the second would have been that the pottage contained no meat as Esau had incorrectly assumed. Jacob's trick of bargaining with a pottage that contained no meat would also serve to possibly explain the strange comment in Genesis 25:28 to the

<sup>11</sup>Lentils are a pea-like vegetable that contain small edible seeds.

effect that Esau loved to eat game or meat. Perhaps the Yahwist is noting that Esau's love of game allowed him to assume wishfully and erroneously that the pottage contained a portion of meat.

We next meet Esau in Genesis 26:34-35 when he is depicted as taking a pair of wives, both of whom are of Hittite ancestry. The first wife is named Judith, and is the daughter of Beerli. And the second wife is named Basemath, the daughter of Elon. Von Rad concludes that this notation in Genesis 26:34-35 is of a priestly origin and should be separated from the earlier account of Jacob and Esau. Von Rad apparently sees this brief comment as a priestly reason for Esau's expulsion from the house of his father.<sup>12</sup>

It is at this point in the narrative that events become rather confusing and commentators begin to offer alternative explanations and theories for textual evidence. For example, von Rad indicates that he feels that the Esau of the Jacob-Esau story in Genesis chapter 25 should be separated from the Esau of Genesis chapters 27 and 33. The Esau of the later chapters is not the ancestor of a nation, according to von Rad, but instead is simply a stereotype for a hunter whom the people of Israel encountered in their dealings to the east of the

<sup>12</sup>von Rad, pg. 268.



Jordan River.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps it would be wise to exert a note of caution in this matter. It is likely that not all of the references to Esau in Genesis should be absolutely equated with Esau the founder and father of Edom. Von Rad argues that the Esau of chapter 27 of Genesis, as well as chapter 33, serves as a kind of prototype for the people of the land of Edom, to the east of the Jordan. He goes on to point out that it was somewhat later in the history of the separate nation of Judah that the association between Edom and Esau was finally formulated.<sup>14</sup> Accordingly, the people of Judah came to associate the people of Edom with the ancestors of Esau. The narrative of Genesis 25 then serves to explain the beginnings of the separation of Edom and Israel, or Esau and Jacob. It was not until later that the Esau of Genesis 27 and 33 came to be tied and identified with Edom and the Edomites. It was during a later period that such asides as Genesis 25:30b were added to the text to provide a kind of explanation. So then, von Rad has theorized with a good deal of credence that the stories of Genesis 25, 27, and 33 were originally distinct and separate. It was not until the people of Judah began to have almost daily intercourse with the Edomites that they began to wonder about the origins of

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., pgg. 270-271.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

these rather curious people. The closeness linguistically between Edom the nation and the redness (  $\square\dot{\tau}\text{ר}$  ) of Esau may have first stimulated the people of Judah or Israel to make a connection. Regardless of the thought patterns of these people, the association was made and Esau, the lost brother of Jacob became the founding father of the nation of Edom. Genesis 25:30b is then an insertion to attempt to formalize this association. Simpson is on solid ground when he notes that it would be unlikely that the Yahwist would interrupt the flow of his narrative to insert an aside like the one found in verse 30b.<sup>15</sup> This insertion then seems to be a later attempt to explain, with the text, just who the Edomites were and how they evolved, as well as their relationship to the Israelites.

<sup>15</sup>Simpson, pg. 668.

THE EDMITE KING LIST OF GENESIS 36

In the 36th chapter of Genesis is found a most curious and fascinating document that relates directly to the history of Edom and the descendants of Esau. It is logical and proper that the document is here placed. At the completion of chapter 35 Isaac has died and the family has gathered to bury him. It is noteworthy that Esau is mentioned as being present at his father's burial. Apparently his exile and banishment did not require a severance of communication from his family. Even though his birthright has been bartered away, he still shares in some family responsibilities, such as attending important functions. However, aside from a reference in I Chronicles 1:35 this section is the last we hear of Esau. His brother Jacob becomes an important figure in the development of Israel but Esau seems now to fade from the scene. It is also important that after the end of chapter 36, which is the completion of the Isaac-Rebekah-Esau-Jacob stories, only Jacob receives mention.

Commentators have traditionally treated this chapter with a collective unknowing shrug. Very little can be known about the individuals mentioned in the list. And unfortunately there are no known Edomite documents to use for comparison with our Genesis list. Perhaps with an increase in excavation in the area of ancient Edom we can hope to uncover some original documents

that will throw some historical light upon some of the individuals mentioned in the Genesis list. Typical of the commentators lack of attention to this list is the treatment of Cuthbert A. Simpson. He devotes a mere three paragraphs to the entire chapter.<sup>1</sup> Others have been more liberal with their comments.

The text begins with a straightforward and interesting comment that the following is the lineage of Esau, that is, Edom. The text at this point makes it absolutely clear that Esau is identified as Edom. They are one in the same. According to this passage (verses 2-5) Esau took three wives: Adah, Oholibamah, and Basemath. This conflicts to some degree with the statement of Genesis 25:34-35 in which Esau is described as taking two Hittite wives, Judith and Basemath. The two lists both mention the name Basemath. However, the lists give different ancestors for this wife. Chapter 25 notes that Basemath is the daughter of Elon and chapter 36 explains that she is the daughter of Ishmael. Curiously, in the list of chapter 36 Elon is said to be the father of Adah while in chapter 25 Elon is recorded as the father of Basemath. However, setting this confusing problem aside we note in verse 5 that the three wives of chapter 36 bore five sons of Esau in the land of Canaan. These children were apparently born prior

<sup>1</sup>Simpson, pgs. 744-747.

to Esau's separation from his brother and parents. It is with this collection of wives and sons that Esau makes his journey into the land of Seir, so named because of a mountain or mountains that there existed. It was in this land that Esau was thought to have founded the nation of Edom.

We can encounter a good deal of confusion over this list, or more properly these lists if we do not, at the outset, establish a kind of overview of their structure. Verses 1-19 contain three separate lists. The lists are distinguishable by their characteristic introduction of either "This is the" or "These are the". Verses 1-8 represent a direct and immediate geneology of Esau. His wives, his sons and their settlement in their new land are all mentioned. Verses 9-14 list the grandsons of Esau. Von Rad claims that the two above mentioned lists represent two distinct traditions.<sup>2</sup> He notes that verses 1-8 refer to Esau as identical with Edom while verses 9-14 call Esau the father or ancestor of Edom. However, there seems to be little else to support the claim of separation of the two lists. They follow a logical and ordered progression from immediate family (i.e. wives and sons) to a description of the grandchildren. They seem intimately and directly related. It is unclear

<sup>2</sup>von Rad, pg. 339.

why von Rad finds it necessary to fragmentize the text. These first two lists seem to fit nicely together in a kind of dovetail.

A third listing can be seen in verses 15-19. This listing contains the clans of the children of Esau. Once again the names of Esau's sons came to the fore. Eliphaz, the first born (notice verses 4), Reuel, born of Esau and Basemeth (notice verse 4b), and all of the sons of Esau and Oholibamah (notice verse 5). The third list concludes with a restatement that Esau and Edom are one in the same.

The fourth list departs from the style and presentation of the three previous lists. Verses 20-30 concern themselves with a geneology of Seir, the Horite. The Horites have long been equated with the Hurrians, a people who migrated into Mesopotamia in the second millennium. Gradually these people filtered southward into the Syria-Palestine area. However, the equation of the Horites with the Hurrians cannot be accepted simply because the two names are similar in sound and appearance. It is likely that some confusion exists in proper identification of these two groups of people. E. A. Speiser correctly points out that the Horites of Seir-Edom, and of verses 20-30, cannot be equated with the Hurrians as has been attempted

by some scholars.<sup>3</sup> Speiser goes on to note that the names of verses 20-30 seem clearly Semitic when they can be analyzed at all. The Hurrians were, from indications, not a Semitic people. So then we are left with a problem in attempting an analysis of verses 20-30. If we do not identify the Horites of this passage with the Hurrians we seem to be without a dock to tie our boat. The placement of the list at this point in the geneology of Edom seems to indicate that the Horites became intermixed with the descendants of Esau. Perhaps the land of Seir, into which the people of Esau entered was occupied by a group of people who were descended from Seir the Horite. In time the two groups intermarried and intermixed to the point that the two groups were indistinguishable. Verses 20-30 are placed between lists and geneologies of Esau's descendants. This placement alone indicates a close association and possibly an eventual merger with the people of Edom.

A fifth list is located in verses 31-39 and is supposedly a listing of the kings of Edom prior to the Israelite kingdom. The earlier establishment of the Edomite kingdom is reflected in the notation that Esau was the elder brother of Jacob. Many con-

<sup>3</sup>E. A. Speiser, Genesis (The Anchor Bible), (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1964), pg. 283.

siderations have been put forth as to how much earlier the Edomite kingdom was established in relation to the kingdom of Israel. John A. Skinner has calculated that because there are eight kings listed in verses 31-39, and allowing twenty years for each reign, the Edomite kingdom was created about 150 years prior to the establishment of Israel's monarchy.<sup>4</sup> This estimate, however, is dependant upon at least two critical factors. Firstly, Skinner must assume that the list of verses 31-39 is complete. This is a somewhat dangerous assumption in light of the fact that sometimes in such ancient king lists names are omitted or are intentionally dropped for political reasons. We have no concrete evidence at this date that the list of Genesis 36:31-39 is complete. Secondly, Skinner uses an average of twenty years for each reign. He notes that an average of twenty years would be "a reasonable allowance in early unsettled times."<sup>5</sup> This statement assumes that the times were indeed unsettled. We have little evidence that suggests that the Edomite kingship was unsettled. It seems unwise to assume that the nation was in a constant state of confusion or was severely unsettled. It may be possible that the opposite situation may be closer to the truth. In any case, twenty years as an average for the reign of a group of kings is

<sup>4</sup>John A. Skinner, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis (International Critical Commentary), (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925), pgg. 434-435.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.



an estimate and a guess. And likewise, the estimate that the Edomite kingdom was established about 150 years prior to the Israelite kingdom is simply a guess and an estimate.

Von Rad notes in his analysis of the fifth king list (i.e. verses 31-39) that our knowledge of Edom rests completely upon Israelite sources. He goes on to comment that if the Israelites had not had such a keen appreciation for the movement of history, the history of Edom might possibly have been lost forever.<sup>6</sup> While it is true that few, if any, documents exist from the kingdom of Edom, it is also true that little, if any, serious archaeological excavation has been undertaken in the area.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps if more attention to the area of ancient Edom were given, we would possess important and revealing historical documents. Von Rad's statements assume that without Israelite historians, the history of Edom would never have been recorded. This attitude reveals a kind of curious Judeo-Christian chauvinism that places Edom in a rather inferior light. If current excavations in the area of ancient Edom should discover, for example, an historical analysis of the kingdom of Israel, von Rad's views would require moderation. He is, however, correct

<sup>6</sup>von Rad, pg. 340.

<sup>7</sup>Currently an expedition led by Crystal M. Bennett is operating in the area. Hopefully this group will help to shed some much needed light upon the Edomites and their history.

at this date.

The sixth and final list of chapter 36 encompasses verses 40-43. This curious list seems to be a kind of sub-list tacked on to the end of the chapter. It contains the names of chiefs and dukes of the people of Esau. It may represent a clue to the organizational patterns of the Edomite kingdom. Possibly the kings of verses 31-39 appointed chiefs or dukes to serve as governors over various sections or districts of the kingdom. However, verses 40-43, like so much of the available Edomite material, seem strange and curious, as well as painfully undecipherable.

EARLY EDOM

While we may certainly debate the reality of the character Esau, we may not dispute the existence of the nation and people of Edom. An expedition headed by Nelson Glueck explored the region of eastern Palestine in 1933-1934. Glueck and his party discovered that a civilization flourished in the area from the twenty-third to the eighteenth centuries b.c.e.<sup>1</sup> Whether we can safely associate and identify this culture with that of the Edomites is dubious. It was likely a kind of forerunner for the Edomite culture. However, about the eighteenth century b.c.e. the existing civilization suffered a major defeat and an accompanying collapse. Glueck speculates that the Hyksos may have been responsible for this period of destruction.<sup>2</sup> From the eighteenth to the thirteenth centuries b.c.e. the area, according to Glueck, seems to have been unoccupied and relatively unsettled. He notes that his expedition did not locate a single site or potsherd that would correspond to this particular time period.<sup>3</sup> Some more recent explorations in the area, notably those of Crystal M. Bennett, may make it necessary to moderate Glueck's views. It is important to note that the scope of

<sup>1</sup>Nelson Glueck, "Explorations in Eastern Palestine," The Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research, Vol. XV, 1934-35, (New Haven: 1935) pg. 138.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

Glueck's expedition was not to scrutinize and examine every possible site. That American expedition was a kind of survey, and as such attempted to deal with the whole of the area. Glueck was providing new information on an area that had known little excavation prior to his arrival.

About the thirteenth century b.c.e. a new form of civilization began to emerge in the area of eastern Palestine. We can probably identify this culture with the Edomites. Glueck's theory that a culture developed about the thirteenth century b.c.e is supported by some of the work of Crystal M. Bennett.<sup>4</sup> The people of this new culture maintained considerable contact with the Israelites and later the Judeans. There seems to have been little activity in the area prior to the thirteenth century b.c.e. The late bronze period in eastern Palestine seems not to have been a period of great development. It is also significant to note that neither the Egyptian town lists nor the Tell el-Amarna letters make any reference to this period in eastern Palestine. It is not until the Egyptian reign of Mer-ne-Ptah (1224 to 1214 b.c.e.) and Ramses III (1195 to 1164 b.c.e.)<sup>5</sup> that Edom or Seir receive any mention.<sup>6</sup> The new culture of

<sup>4</sup>Crystal M. Bennett, "An Archaeological Survey of Biblical Edom," Perspective, Vol. XII (Spring, 1971) pgs. 35-44.

<sup>5</sup>John A. Wilson, The Culture of Ancient Egypt, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), pg. 320.

<sup>6</sup>Glueck, pg. 138.

Semitic origin seems to have displaced or perhaps absorbed the existing societal structures of bedouin peoples. Genesis 14:6 and Deuteronomy 2:12 seem to indicate that a Horite culture was displaced by the invading Edomites. It is also perhaps significant to note that the people that came to be known as the Edomites were but one of a group of invading Semites. After a series of Semitic victories over the native peoples, the various invading groups apparently broke up into smaller groups or natural divisions and settled and held specific geographical areas. Probably the Moabites, the Ammonites, the Amorites, and of course the Edomites settled into groups that were roughly parallel to their original tribal orientation. From the thirteenth to the eighth centuries b.c.e. these groups controlled most all of eastern Palestine despite occasional territorial and trading disputes amongst themselves. Evidence seems to point to the conclusion that the land at this time was well developed and the various kingdoms were highly organized. The land is dotted with well constructed stone walls and villages.<sup>7</sup> The borders of the various kingdoms were frequently defended with heavy fortresses that were usually constructed within sight of one another. Glueck concludes that the agricultural

<sup>7</sup>Nelson Glueck, "The Civilization of the Edomites," The Biblical Archaeologist, Vol. X, No. 4 (1947), pg. 78.

endeavours of these kingdoms were highly organized and that commerce was ordered and organized.<sup>8</sup> Little is known of the literature of these various kingdoms. However, one existing example of their literary style can be found on the so-called Moabite stone. This inscribed stele describes how Mesha, a Moabite, was captured by Omri<sup>9</sup> and Ahab<sup>10</sup> but eventually escapes because of the strength and power of the Moabite god Chemosh. The thirty-four line inscription seems to parallel some of the events of II Samuel chapter one and three. In addition, Mesha is mentioned as being the king of Moab in II Kings 3:4ff. The Moabite stone provides strong evidence that the kingdoms of eastern Palestine were hardly illiterate tribesmen. The stone seems to suggest a high degree of culture, a separate form of worship, and a system of cities and villages, all of which seem to be well defended and constructed.<sup>11</sup>

Another hint that the area was more than a cultural wasteland can be found in the book of Job. One of Job's comforters was Eliphaz the Temanite. Although the site has not been positively identified, Teman is

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>The sixth king of Israel (876 to 869 b.c.e.).

<sup>10</sup>Son of Omri, ruled from 869 to 850 b.c.e.

<sup>11</sup>For more information on the Moabite stone see D. Winton Thomas (ed.), Documents from Old Testament Times, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1958), pgg. 195-199.

usually represented as one of the principal localities of Edom. Temanites were noted especially for their great wisdom.<sup>12</sup> Jeremiah 49:7 seems to contain a thinly veiled reference to the great wisdom of Teman in the land of Edom. And the apocryphal book of Baruch contains another reference to the wisdom of Teman and also calls attention to the searchers of understanding.<sup>13</sup> At least one commentator assigns an Edomite heritage to the princes referred to in Proverbs 30:1 and 31:1. Upon close examination of the biblical texts, it seems that the area of eastern Palestine was thought of rather highly in regard to wisdom and knowledge. These biblical references suggest that Edom and her sister kingdoms probably possessed a corpus of literature as well as a rich oral tradition. However, we can only hope that future archaeological expeditions will unearth some of these as yet undiscovered documents.

<sup>12</sup>Marvin H. Pope, Job (The Anchor Bible), (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1965), pg. 24.

<sup>13</sup>Note Baruch 3:22-23.

THE GEOGRAPHY OF EDOM

Before we attempt to analyze the relationship between the Edomites and the Israelites it may be prudent and wise to first examine the geography of the nation of Edom. The natural closeness of Edom and Israel created a conflict that in many ways was never really settled. In order to appreciate the importance of the geography of the area we must first determine as best we can exactly what area made up ancient Edom.

Generally we can note that Edom's boundaries and possessions were located to the south and east of Judah and the Dead Sea, and north of the Sinai peninsula, the Arabian Desert, and the Gulf of Aqaba. The actual boundaries of the nation of Edom are a bit difficult to fix because, like many of her neighbours, they were almost constantly in a state of flux. A victorious military campaign or expedition might have extended the border while at another juncture a military setback would have caused the border to contract. Edom's position in the ancient Near East allowed her to serve a relatively active role in the many trading routes. Trade routes running northward from Arabia would have found their way through the land of Edom.<sup>1</sup> The boundaries of Edom were well protected by a series

<sup>1</sup>Note Isaiah 21:13, 14, Job 6:19, Ezekiel 27:15, 21-22, Amos 1:6, 9, and Genesis 37:25.



JUDAH  
•  
BEER SHEBA

Dead  
Sea

MOAB

Wadi el Hesa

ARABAH

•  
Tafileh

•  
BOZRAH

ESAU

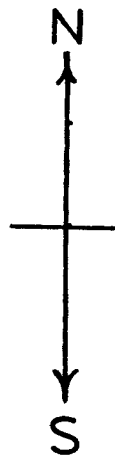
•  
PETRA  
(Sela)

THE

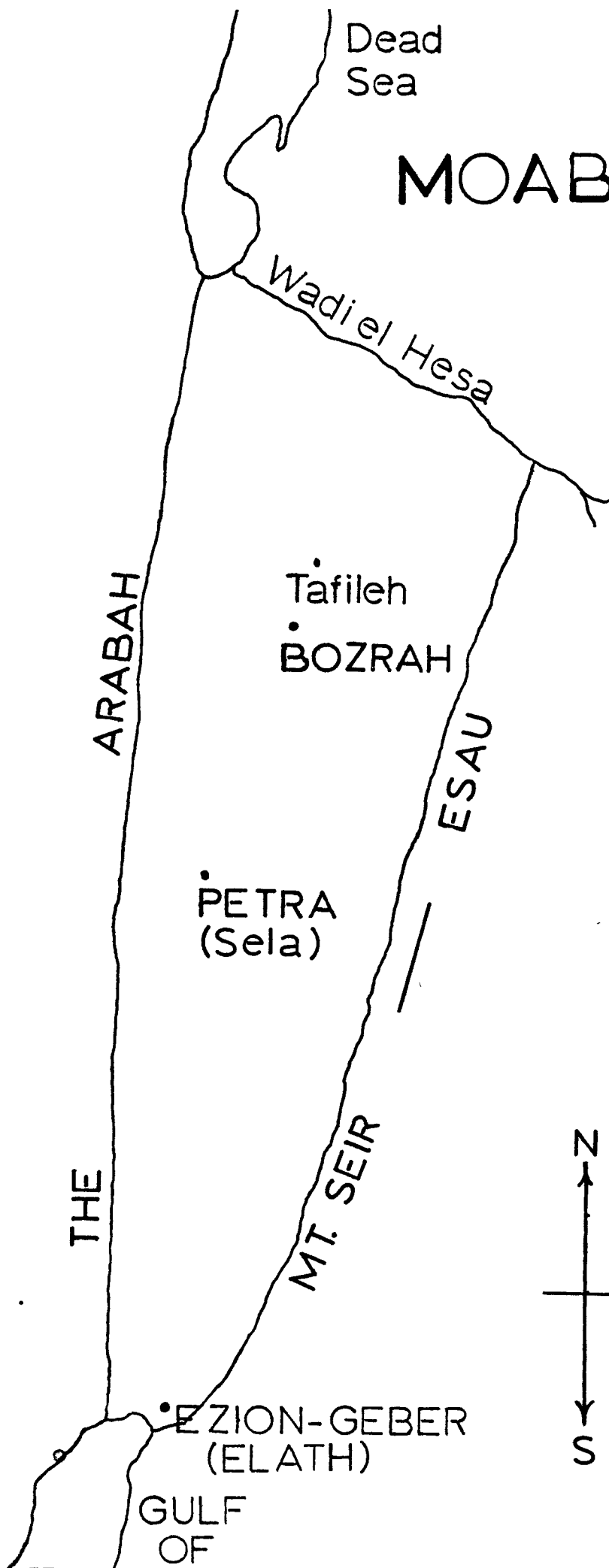
MT. SEIR

•  
EZION-GEGER  
(ELATH)

GULF  
OF



THE  
NEGEB  
DESERT



of border fortresses. These defense structures were so well placed that some modern governments have from time to time utilized the sites for their military installations. In ancient times, the Nabateans, who succeeded the Edomites, incorporated the entire Edomite defense system into their own military fortress arrangements. Glueck points out that many of the villages and towns of Edom did not utilize heavy walled defense systems, but instead chose to depend upon the border systems for protection.<sup>2</sup>

The northern boundary of Edom was protected by a series of military installations which looked down upon the Wadi el-Hesa. This wadi likely served as a relatively permanent line of demarcation between Edom and her neighbour to the north, Moab. The Wadi el-Hesa is probably the ancient Valley of Zered or the Brook of the Willows mentioned in Isaiah 15:7. Naturally Edom and Moab argued constantly over the land on either side of the wadi. Both countries seem to have claimed land held by the other. But despite this bickering, the wadi served satisfactorily as a boundary. Perhaps one of the reasons the wadi was originally chosen as a boundary was the vivid contrast between the land on either side. To the north of Wadi el-Hesa is the plateau of the nation of Moab and to the south lies

<sup>2</sup>Nelson Glueck, "The Boundaries of Edom." The Hebrew Union College Annual, Vol. XI (1936), pg. 143.

the mountainous region of Edom. Yet even to the south a sort of plateau exists running north to south. This plateau, upon which the people of Edom built their civilization, served as a kind of catchall for the last fragments of all Mediterranean rainstorms. Wadis running in parallel lines, east to west, provided some degree of water and moisture to an otherwise very dry and thirsty land. The north to south Edomite plateau is made up largely of limestone and sandstone that can support a limited amount of vegetation. The Edomites settled upon the west side of their plateau in order to best utilize their precious and limited amount of annual rainfall. The western portion of the plateau received the heaviest amount of rainfall and could support an adequate amount of vegetation. This geological phenomenon resulted in an Edomite nation that was rather long and narrow, north to south.

Easily the most important geological feature of the country of Edom is the Arabah. The Arabah is a long rift in the face of the land extending from the Dead Sea to the Gulf of Aqaba. Some geologists have noted that the rift extends northward from the Dead Sea to the Sea of Chinnereth.<sup>3</sup> While this is likely the case, we need not here concern ourselves with the

<sup>3</sup>The Sea of Chinnereth is also known as the Sea of Galilee.

northern extension of the Arabah. The section effecting the Edomites is, of course, our primary concern. The rift forms a natural line of division between eastern and western Palestine. The Arabah varies in width from one-half mile near Petra to a maximum width of almost thirteen miles. Not only did the Arabah provide a natural boundary between Edom and Israel, it also held importance for two more valuable reasons. Firstly, it contained valuable deposits of various minerals, most notably copper. Glueck located a number of copper mining and smelting operations. Pottery finds at these sites seem to indicate operation from the thirteenth to the eighth centuries b.c.e.<sup>4</sup> In addition, the area was rich in iron ore deposits and Glueck located evidence of mining of that mineral. Once again, Glueck did not have sufficient time or resources to excavate the Arabah in detail. However, his survey and its discoveries have led him to theorize that some of the mining and smelting activities remained active into the period known as Early Iron II.<sup>5</sup> The rich mineral deposits of the Arabah can serve to explain, or offer help in interpretation, the otherwise problematic passage of Deuteronomy 8:9 that states

<sup>4</sup>Glueck, "The Boundaries of Edom," pg. 144.

<sup>5</sup>William Foxwell Albright fixes the dates for the Iron II period as from about 900 to 587 b.c.e.

that the promised land will yield up stones made of iron and hills from which copper can be extracted. The Arabah and its cliff-like banks would surely yield copper and iron ore, whereas the land of Israel is otherwise lacking in prolific mineral deposits.

A second important value of the Arabah was that it formed a kind of natural passageway from the Arabian Desert northward. It was an ancient turnpike or thoroughfare that was well traveled by rich caravans. Naturally whoever controlled the Arabah could extract duty from the masters of the caravans for passage. The Edomites and the Judeans seem to have been constantly at one another's throats over control of this valuable piece of real estate. Despite this natural caravan path, we should not assume that the Arabah was a long continuous roadway. The rainy season swelled the Arabah with water that undoubtedly created many problems for travelers. And in the dry season the area became unpleasantly dry and hot. At some points the Arabah seems to meander off into a kind of cul-de-sac. Travel along the Arabah was highly difficult. However, caravan leaders realized that although it was difficult, the Arabah provided the best and easiest passage through Palestine.

The Arabah is slightly sloped from east to west, providing for a westward run-off of water. The rainy seasons near the Arabah have been known to be severe and as a result of that severity a great quantity of

sand has been washed into the rift. Therefore only the hardiest of plantlife can there exist. Generally the Arabah is a sandy, desert-like, dreary, and uncomfortable place. Its economic importance, however, served to offset any of its aesthetic shortcomings. The history of the Arabah is naturally closely linked to the history of Edom. We discussed briefly the Iron Age period of mining and smelting in the Arabah. The southern end of the Arabah was represented by the port city of Ezion-Geber which was later renamed Elath.<sup>6</sup> It is difficult to pinpoint the extent of the southern control of Edom. However, it seems likely that Ezion-Geber served the kingdom of Edom during most of its history. In I Kings 9:26 Ezion-Geber is described as being located on the Red Sea. The city was a vital link in the trade routes of the ancient Near East. It was the port of departure for caravans heading northward, as well as a terminus for caravans traveling southward along the route of the Arabah. The Arabah has been called the "Gateway of Arabia"<sup>7</sup> and Ezion-Geber was certainly one of the major cities along the path of the Arabah.

Traveling northward from Ezion-Geber along the

<sup>6</sup>The city was apparently called Ezion-Geber from the tenth to the fifth centuries b.c.e. After that period it was referred to as Elath.

<sup>7</sup>George Adam Smith, The Historical Geography of the Holy Land, (London: Fontana Library of Theology and Philosophy, 1966), pg. 367.

Arabah, the first city of notable size that would have been encountered would have been Petra. Actually the city of Petra did not take on great significance and grandeur until the occupation of the Nabateans. The Edomites created the smaller city of Sela to serve as their capital. Sela is actually located within the city of Petra. Sela is located and situated high upon the mountain of Umm el-Biyara and was virtually impregnable. During the time of the Edomite kingdom, the city of Sela did not possess the magnificence that was later the case under the Nabateans. Crystal M. Bennett notes that the population was likely secure and sedentary. She discovered vast numbers of loomweights, spindle whorls, and associated weaving tools together with a large number of cooking pots, storage jars, and platters.<sup>8</sup> This would indicate a populace that was rather settled and secure.

The Edomites chose the small city of Sela to be their capital for possibly two reasons. Firstly, it formed a kind of natural fortress as it perched upon its mountain foundations. It was relatively safe from foreign marauders. And secondly, it was fairly centrally located between the northern and southern sections of the kingdom. It was mentioned earlier that the country took on a rather odd physical dimension in that it was about 100 miles long and often only fifteen miles in width. This phenomenon

<sup>8</sup>Bennett, pg. 40.

served to create two centers of life in Edom. The smaller northern section contained the city of Bozrah. This city was noted for its fine weaving and garment making industry as noted in Isaiah 63:1-3. In addition, it was one of the few Edomite cities that could support an extensive collection of lambs and goats as noted in Isaiah 34:6. But Bozrah was perhaps best known as a trading city along the Arabah. It served the northern section of Edom as the chief city and center. Crystal M. Bennett describes it thusly,

Biblical Bozrah, modern Buseirah, was a very important town for the Edomites, overlooking the mining region of Fenan (Biblical Punon) and a key point on the King's Highway, once it had crossed the frontier with Moab. Bozrah overlooks also two villages which have ancient names, Sil to the northwest and Ramses to the west. The latter name was not current in modern Arabic until the last twenty years; it is reasonable to suppose, therefore, that the naming of this village harks back to an early tradition. A flight of imagination could envision it, perhaps, as an army post during the campaigns of Ramses II against Moab and Edom, but no sherds have been found there, as yet, to support such a flight.<sup>9</sup>

Also in the northern section of the country is located the rich agricultural center of Tafiieh. Unlike most of the rest of Edom, the area around Tafiieh was highly fertile. But although the Edomites valued Tafiieh it would have been unwise to make it a strategic military center. Tafiieh would have been a poor capital city

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., pg. 43.



because of the difficulty the Edomites would have encountered in building a defense system. So although the northern section was smaller, it had a much richer soil and was generally a more pleasant place to live. The southern section was higher in altitude but seems much more barren and forbidding.

The eastern border of Edom was the desert and the Edomites did not concentrate heavy fortifications in this area. However, the western border represented mainly by the Arabah required considerable protection. The entire length of this border was defended by forts located sometimes only four and one-half miles apart.<sup>10</sup> George Adam Smith devotes not a small section of his chapter on Edom to a description of the various mountains that dotted the landscape.<sup>11</sup> He describes Mount Esau as actually being a chain of mountains that made up the eastern part of the nation of Edom. These mountains reached an altitude of between four and five thousand feet.<sup>12</sup> This altitude was somewhat higher than the mountains of Moab and thus a different climate resulted. The plateau of the Mount Esau provides cooler temperatures and seems to hold snow longer in the spring months. Smith describes the

<sup>10</sup>Dennis Baly, The Geography of the Bible, (New York: Harper & Bros. Publishers, 1957). pg. 242.

<sup>11</sup>Smith, Historical Geography of the Holy Land, pgg. 356-371.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., pg. 362.

great plateau that was the nation of Edom as being an eastward recession of limestone.<sup>13</sup> While the mountains of Moab, to the north, are characterized by an unbroken wall of limestone, the mountains of Edom seem much more varied in both form and colour.

Although severely limited at times, the water supply of Edom seems to have been sufficient to maintain an agricultural level adequate to feed the general populace. The countless wadis of the Edomite plateau seemingly held enough water to endure the waterless, hot, and extremely dry months of the summer. The geographical structure of the land naturally resulted in a rapid dispersion of the precious water. Therefore, few, if any, permanent streams or rivers existed. This problem could have been overcome with a system for storing water or perhaps digging deep wells. Archaeologists have not as yet uncovered any of these water storage systems. However, future expeditions will undoubtedly encounter them. Small temporary brooks and copious dew deposits served to assist the Edomite farmer in his rather difficult tasks. Smith discovered in his travels across the land of Edom that winter rain is even today often trapped in temporary dams and reservoirs. He came across a varied collection of vegetation in his investigations. Among the plantlife in the area was

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

found evergreens, juniper, cherry trees, caper, honeysuckle, olive, fig, and poplar trees.<sup>14</sup> It is likely that if Edom would have had an access to a more plentiful supply of fresh water that a thriving agricultural base would have been developed. The land was dry but seems quite fertile with the addition of water. However, the relative scarcity of water rendered an otherwise rich soil all but useless throughout much of the nation. The climate being less than conducive to growing crops or animals, the Edomite turned out of necessity to the business of trading for income. With the prosperous seaport of Ezion-Geber under Edomite control, the people prospered in their trade with Egypt, Arabia, and Syria. And with Sela firmly under the grip of the Edomite authority, the people had a grasp upon the many trade caravans that almost were required to pass through Edom. There also seems to be evidence that the Edomites carried on an active trade in slaves with Gaza and Tyre. In Amos 1:6, 9 we find references to the sins of Gaza in delivering up slaves to the Edomites. In addition, the skill of the father of Edom, Esau, undoubtedly provided a relatively constant supply of ready fresh meat. The area's wildlife probably provided Edom's hunters with a source of food.<sup>15</sup> Of course Edom pursued her interest

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., pg. 363.

<sup>15</sup>Smith, Sarcophagus of an Ancient Civilization, pg. 203.

in the mining of the Arabah in order to provide a source of income. Crystal M. Bennett summarized the economic state of Edom by noting,

It is clear, therefore, that while the physical nature of Edom must have precluded any large scale agricultural activities and/or animal husbandry as practised by its northern neighbors such as Moab, its geological nature, the presence of the copper mines, would encourage exploitation and commerce.<sup>16</sup>

So then we have seen how the geography of the nation of Edom played a vital role in her development, as well as her history. But in order to better understand the influence and pressures felt by Edom we must examine her in her dealings with her neighbours. Few documents exist that will provide us with information and data from a Moabite, Ammonite, or Amorite perspective. The only data with which we have to work, for better or for worse, is the information provided in the Old Testament, and to a lesser degree the New Testament and the apocryphal material. It is through the prism of the history of Israel and later Judah that we must attempt to sort out the history of Edom.

<sup>16</sup>Bennett, pg. 38.

EDOM AND ISRAEL

The relationship between Edom and Israel seems to have been a constant continuation of squabbling and bickering. Their stormy relationship was characterized by a kind of love/hate relationship that produced a state of give and take regarding the land which both nations claimed as their own. This state of enmity resulted in an almost constant condition of warfare, often quite limited, between Israel and Edom. The main reason for this state was debate over control of the Arabah and its rich mineral deposits, as well as its control over the many caravans. However, the relationship between Israel and Edom was strained from the very beginning.

Perhaps the first contact between the two peoples that can almost certainly be classified as historical can be located in the book of Judges. The Israelites were apparently in the midst of their celebrated migration into the promised land and were detained by the inhabitants of that land, the Moabites, the Ammonites, and the Edomites. In Judges 11: 12-28 we find Jephthah, the leader and judge of the Israelites, offering to bargain with the king of the Ammonites. Jephthah claims a rightful possession of the land held by the king. The story details Jephthah's claim on the land, as well as the Ammonite king's claim. The king of Ammon claims

possession because he accuses the Israelites of seizing the land "on coming from Egypt." And Jephtah claims that the land rightfully belongs to his people. But the critical section of the story, for our discussion, is the part dealing with Edom. We have noted that the Genesis 36 Edomite king list made references to the fact that Edom had at least eight kings prior to the establishment of the Israelite monarchy. This statement is supported by the fact that the Israelites of Judges 11 encounter the Edomites already firmly entrenched in the land upon the Israelite arrival upon the scene.

Failing to gain satisfaction from the Ammonite king, Jephtah in verse 17 sends a messenger to the king of Edom (unnamed) to attempt to gain permission for a passage through the Edomite territory. When the king of Edom refused such permission the Israelites stopped at Kadesh, apparently to decide upon their next plan of action. In verse 18 we are told that the Israelites journeyed around Edom and Moab and arrived on the east side of the land of Moab. There is some debate as to whether the Edomites traveled to the east or to the west of Moab and Edom.<sup>1</sup> However, it seems most likely that the people of Israel used the eastern passage through the relatively unoccupied and desert-like land to the

<sup>1</sup>A listing of the alternate suggested routes of passage can be found in Herbert G. May, Oxford Bible Atlas, (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), pgg. 58-59.

east of Edom. If a western passage were undertaken it would have been difficult for the Israelites to have found themselves to the east of Moab (verse 18) at the completion of their journey. Regardless of the outcome of this debate, a few facts can be garnered from the Judges account. Firstly, the Edomites were in control of the King's Highway, a passage along the Arabah, winding northward. This roadway was an important passage through the trans-Jordan area. The roadway is mentioned in Numbers 20:17 and 21:22 in association with Moses. In later times the Romans paved the highway so efficiently that it is still employed today. During the period of the Israelite exodus, the Edomites controlled at least part of that highway. This seems to indicate that the nation of Edom had risen in military prowess and strength to the point that they could defend a valuable piece of property from their neighbours. A second important point that can be extracted from the passage is that the Edomites were established well before the Israelite settlement. If we accept Glueck's theory that the civilization of the Edomites did not solidify until the thirteenth century b.c.e., we can surely say that the Israelite exodus could not have occurred prior to that date.<sup>2</sup> Recalling the Israelite encounter with the king of Edom and his rejection of their application

<sup>2</sup>Glueck, "The Civilization of the Edomites,"  
pg. 55.

for passage, we can conclude that the exodus could not have taken place until at least the thirteenth century b.c.e. Had the exodus occurred earlier than the thirteenth century b.c.e., the Israelites would not have come into contact with a well fortified Edom, whose rulers held the power to permit or disallow the wanderers passage through his land.

As the Israelites began to settle in the land of Canaan, they were constantly threatened by the power and influence of the Edomite kingdom to the east. Relatively little is known about the relationship between the two countries during this early period of Israelite rise to power and dominance. As the Israelites continued to gain power and military strength, they eyed with a certain amount of envy the rich Edomite port city of Ezion-Geber on the Red Sea. The Mediterranean Sea lacked an adequate port city for the Israelite trading industry, so the city of Ezion-Geber grew in importance in the eyes of the Israelites. The early Israelite kings were likely pressured to attempt expansion into the Edomite territory in order to seize control of the port city, as well as the mineral deposits of the Arabah. In addition, the Israelite kings were naturally a bit hesitant to challenge the powerful Mediterranean trading nations of Phoenicia and Egypt. In order to gain access to a seaport and a trading route the Israel-



ites wisely sought to challenge the authority of the Edomites. It was not until the kingship of David that the nation of Israel gained sufficient strength to seriously challenge the Edomites. David correctly theorized that control of the Arabah would bring about an eventual collapse of the power of Edom. Edom's unusual geographical layout made it essential the smaller northern section of the country be kept in contact with the larger and wealthier southern section. David realized that by splitting the nation north from south, he could seriously weaken the defense structures and bring about the demise of Edom. David is depicted in II Samuel 8:13-15 as having conquered the Edomites and installing garrisons throughout the land. The story mentions the site of the decisive battle as being fought in the Valley of Salt. George B. Caird has identified the Valley of Salt as the Wadi el-Milh, near Beer-Sheba.<sup>3</sup> Seemingly the same battle is described in I Chronicles 18:12 where Abishai, the son of Zeruah, killed 18,000 of the enemy Edomite soldiers. Abishai apparently was one of David's military advisors. He is described in II Samuel 23:18 as one of David's most powerful chiefs. He generally seems to have been one of David's closest companions in military adventures.

<sup>3</sup>George B. Caird, The Books of I and II Samuel (The Interpreter's Bible, Volume 2), (Nashville: The Abingdon Press, 1956), pg. 1090.

Whoever was responsible for the conquest of the Edomites in the Valley of Salt, the result was the same. David took control of the Arabah and with it he assumed command over the valuable port city of Ezion-Geber. This victory perhaps was the first time the Israelites had controlled a city on the Red Sea. As a kind of side benefit from the victory, David is described in the story mentioned above as taking all the Edomites as servants. David, as well as most all of Israel, seems to have a rather curious attitude toward the Edomites during this specific period. David is described as taking the Edomites only as his servants. Animosity toward the defeated Edomites is, at this point, minimal. David is not depicted as displaying any great hatred toward either Edom or her people. The victims of the defeat are not described as slaves but instead as servants. We read in I Samuel 21:7 that David's predecessor, Saul, had kept an Edomite servant named Doeg who was in charge of the king's herdsmen. The fact that Saul placed Doeg, a foreigner, in a highly responsible position seems to indicate something less than a violent hostility against the Edomites during this early period.

Another important passage that can perhaps serve to illuminate Israelite attitudes toward the Edomites during the period of the united monarchy can be found in Deuteronomy 23:7-8. There we can read,

You shall not abhor an Edomite, for he is your brother; you shall not abhor an Egyptian, because you were a sojourner in his land. The children of the third generation that are born to them may enter the assembly of the Lord.

This unusual passage has been assigned to various dates of origin. An argument that it belongs in a later, perhaps post-exilic, period seems weak when one notes that the post-exilic prophets exercised a profound hatred and animosity toward Edom and the Edomites. G. Ernest Wright places this passage very early in the development of Israel. He notes that the passage may have its roots as early as the tenth century b.c.e.<sup>4</sup> The attitude reflected in this passage can perhaps be traced and linked to the Jacob-Esau stories and the association made between Edom and Esau. The passage certainly makes a pointed reference to the fact that an Edomite was considered a brother which lends credence to the argument that this passage is linked to the Jacob-Esau stories. The special position the Edomite enjoyed in the social status of Israel was probably strengthened by the Israelite belief that Yahweh resided in the land of Edom or Seir. In Deuteronomy 33:2, Judges 5:4, and even Habakkuk 3:3 we find references to the belief that Yahweh lived within the boundaries of Edom. This belief could certainly not have damaged the esteem with

<sup>4</sup>G. Ernest Wright, The Book of Deuteronomy (The Interpreter's Bible, Volume 2), (Nashville: The Abingdon Press, 1956), pg. 469.

which the Israelite treated an Edomite. We have earlier presented information to the effect that the Edomites were thought to have possessed great wisdom and intelligence. These subtle biblical asides seem to strengthen the argument that the Israelite held a rather special place in his mind for an Edomite, at least in the early period of the united monarchy.

However, this high regard did not prevent or even lessen the tensions which developed between the two nations over control of the Arabah and the port city of Ezion-Geber. After the death of David, Solomon continued to maintain firm control of the city. In addition, Solomon seems to have strengthened the Israelite hold on the Arabah by exploiting its mineral wealth. Glueck claims that Solomon was the first to place the mining industry of the Arabah on a truly national scale.<sup>5</sup> It seems highly likely that Solomon employed Edomite slave labour in his mining efforts.

But the mining efforts in the Arabah were not the only projects which Solomon conducted. Actually the control of the Arabah opened up a kind of golden age for the Israelites as they began a prosperous kind of trading activity with many of the kingdoms of the ancient Near East. It was not accidental that the

<sup>5</sup>Nelson Glueck, The Other Side of the Jordan, (Cambridge: The American Schools of Oriental Research, 1970), pg. 100.

zenith of the Israelite monarchy came during a period when the country enjoyed complete control over the Arabah and with it access and control over the city of Ezion-Geber. Control of the Arabah meant great wealth and considerable power during this period. The mines of the Arabah provided Solomon with a steady supply of copper and iron that went into trading resources of the prospering nation of Israel. It seems likely that part of the copper of the Arabah went into the building of Solomon's temple. With some assistance from the Phoenicians, Solomon constructed a great trading navy that sailed from Ezion-Geber loaded with copper ingots and disks to be traded for the valuable goods of Arabia, Africa, and perhaps even India. In I Kings 9:27-28 we read that Solomon sent a fleet under Hiram's command to trade for gold. An idea of the vastness of Solomon's trading empire can be gotten from the fact that the Queen of Sheba traveled from her home in southern Arabia to arrange a trading agreement. The queen undertook the difficult journey in order, apparently, to determine the trading spheres of influence with Solomon. We read of Solomon's illustrious visitor in I Kings 10:1, 2, 10,

Now when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord, she came to him with hard questions. She came to Jerusalem with a very great retinue, with camels bearing spices, and very much gold, and precious stones; and

when she came to Solomon, she told him all that was on her mind ... Then she gave the king a hundred and twenty talents of gold, and a very great quantity of spices, and precious stones; never again came such an abundance of spices as these which the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon.

Apparently this great ancient summit meeting concluded in a satisfactory bargain both for Solomon as well as the Queen of Sheba. The pair parted with an exchange of gifts as we read in I Kings 10:13,

And King Solomon gave to the queen of Sheba all that she desired, whatever she asked besides what was given her by the bounty of King Solomon. So she turned and went back to her own land, with her servants.

The text of I Kings 10:13 seems very business-like and almost like a modern press release. The tone of the passage seems to indicate that all was settled amiably among the two monarchs.

Solomon's reign was probably well received by his fellow countrymen. His rule marked the highwater point for the Israelite monarchy, and for Israel as a power in the Near East. However, we know comparatively little about how the Edomites felt about Solomon's methods and policies regarding their country. One would hardly expect them to welcome the rule of Solomon with great rejoicing and celebration. Solomon's efforts at mining the Arabah were probably undertaken with slave labour provided by unwilling Edomites. The Old Testament records little of the Edomite reaction

to this form of subjugation at the hands of Solomon. There is, however, one tidbit of evidence to support the idea that the Edomites did not accept their domination willingly or passively. In I Kings 11:14-22, 25 we find evidence of an Edomite named Hadad, who is described as a former prince or nobleman in the courts of Edom (verse 14). During one of the purges of the nation of Edom at the hands of the Israelites Hadad fled from Edom into Egypt. The Pharaoh of Egypt welcomed Hadad and his servants and the former Edomite prince settled in Egypt. He apparently pleased the Pharaoh because the Egyptian leader eventually offered his sister-in-law to be the wife of Hadad. James A. Montgomery correctly points out that this type of treatment on the part of the Pharaoh was not highly unusual in the royal etiquette of the orient. In fact, not only was it proper etiquette, it was also simply good politics on the Pharaoh's part.<sup>6</sup> Any efforts he could make to diminish the power, prestige, and influence of the newly powerful nation of Israel would have proven beneficial to the Egyptian interests. Hadad apparently spent a goodly portion of his young adult life in exile in Egypt before finally returning to his homeland to wage a kind of persistent guerilla warfare

<sup>6</sup>James A. Montgomery, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary of the Books of Kings (The International Critical Commentary), (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), pg. 239.

against Solomon's government. It is said in verse 25 that Hadad was an adversary of Israel and he went about the countryside "doing mischief" because he "abhorred Israel." So then, Solomon's reign was likely not universally accepted in a passive manner by the people of Edom. Clearly Hadad could not have performed such mischief without some support and sympathy from a fairly large segment of the Edomite populace. However, despite the annoyance of Hadad and his followers, Solomon maintained a firm grip upon the Arabah and its most important prize, the seaport of Ezion-Geber. The king set himself up as a kind of middleman between the kingdoms and nations of the Near East and extracted considerable wealth from his trading skills. In I Kings 10:14-15 we learn that in one year Solomon accumulated 666 talents of gold from the traffic of traders and from all the kings of Arabia. In addition, Solomon proved to be a capable horse trader. In I Kings 10:28-29 we read that Solomon imported horses from Egypt and Kue. Overall in the tenth chapter of I Kings we find the nations or empires of Sheba, Ophir, Lebanon, Egypt, Kue, and even the Hittite empire cited as doing business with Solomon and his thriving nation. But with the death of Solomon about 922 b.c.e. the vast trading empire began to disintegrate. The united monarchy of Israel and Judah split and the country was rather severely weakened. This schism proved to be a



boon to the long suffering Edomites who were understandably dissatisfied under the domination of Solomon. The weakness of Israel provided an opportunity for the Edomites to seize their long sought freedom. From the death of Solomon until the advent of the Nabatean incursion into the land of Edom, the Edomites would mainly have to concern themselves with the nation of Judah. And the strength of Judah never approached the power and influence demonstrated under Solomon and his powerful united monarchy.

EDOM AND JUDAH

With the passing of Solomon from the scene, the kingship was assumed by Rehoboam in the southern part of the shattered nation. It can safely be assumed that when Rehoboam assumed the throne, the Edomites were under the relatively tight control of Solomon's empire. However, little more than 100 years later the Judeans found it necessary to suppress an Edomite uprising in a rather severe manner. We read in II Kings 14:7 that king Amaziah, who ruled from 800 to 783 b.c.e.<sup>1</sup>, killed 10,000 Edomites in the Valley of Salt and captured the city of Sela and renamed the city Joktheel. This military effort on the part of Amaziah assumes that the Edomites must have been in a state of revolt against the Judean authority. And the revolt evidently had been somewhat successful as king Amaziah found it necessary to recapture the city of Sela that was previously held by Solomon. It is interesting to note that the historians of the book of II Kings describe the decisive battle of Amaziah's campaign as taking place in the Valley of Salt. We recall that David or Abishai initially vanquished the Edomites at that site. It is impossible to determine the historical accuracy of either the victory of Amaziah or David in the Valley of Salt. However, the description of

<sup>1</sup>John Bright, A History of Israel, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1972), pg. 480.

Amaziah's victory cannot but be compared to David's effort. It is surely conceivable that the later description is an attempt to recapture some of the lost power and authority of the military efforts and campaigns of David. However, we cannot be certain. In II Chronicles 25:11-14 Amaziah's campaign against the Edomites is described a bit differently. In this account the king savagely puts down the Edomite revolt but the recapture of Sela is not mentioned. There is one notable feature of the II Chronicles account. In verse 14 the king is described worshipping the gods of the Edomites and making offerings to them. This conduct does not go unnoticed by Yahweh and a prophet was sent to Amaziah to announce Yahweh's disapproval. The key point of the campaigns of Amaziah against the Edomites was, of course, that such campaigns were necessary at all. The authority of the government of Judah had seemingly so weakened after the death of Solomon that open rebellion and revolts by former vassal states like Edom threatened to topple the monarchy. This serious erosion of power seems to have taken place over a fairly short period of time. One of the major reasons for the collapse of power lies in the stoppage of naval activity upon the Red Sea. Less than half a century after Solomon's death we find king Jehoshaphat attempting to reestablish the royal trading navy.

Jehoshaphat had temporarily quelled the conflict between the northern and southern kingdoms by arranging the marriage of his son Joram to Ahab's daughter Athaliah. With a measure of internal peace restored, Jehoshaphat embarked upon a campaign to place back into use the city of Ezion-Geber. In I Kings 22:48 we learn that the king had some ships constructed and ordered them to sail to Ophir to trade copper products for the many desirable products of Arabia. The adventure, however, ended in disaster as we learn in I Kings 22:48 that the ships were wrecked at Ezion-Geber, never having left the harbour. Ahaziah, the son of Ahab, later attempted to reinterest king Jehoshaphat in a sailing venture. But the king, having learned an expensive lesson, refused to cooperate. We can perhaps see further evidence of the erosion of Judean authority over the Edomites in II Chronicles 20:10 where a combined force of Edomites, Ammonites, and Moabites attempted to confront Jehoshaphat's army near Engedi. Glueck claims the Edomites were able to hold off any incursion on the part of the Judeans for about fifty years, or until the successful campaign of Amaziah.<sup>2</sup>

There is precious little information available concerning Judean-Edomite relations from the time of Jehoshaphat until the campaigns of Amaziah. However,

<sup>2</sup>Glueck, "The Boundaries of Edom," pg. 151.

one shred of evidence seems to lend support to the theory that the Edomites were almost constantly in a state of revolt against Judean authority. In II Kings 8:20 we find the Edomites engaged in a revolt against king Joram or Jehoram. This king, who ruled from about 849 to 842 b.c.e.,<sup>3</sup> managed to quash the rebellion of the active Edomites.

Uzziah, the son of Amaziah, continued his father's policies of attempting to reestablish control over the Arabah.<sup>4</sup> In II Kings 14:22 we find Uzziah completing his mission and placing Ezion-Geber under Judean control. Uzziah or Azariah went even one step further by building a new city near the site of Ezion-Geber. He named the city Elath. This account of Uzziah's victories and conquests is also mentioned in II Chronicles 26:2.<sup>5</sup>

Seemingly Edom, the Arabah, and Ezion-Geber all remained under the thumb of the Judeans until the time of Uzziah's grandson, Ahaz, who ruled from 735 to 715 b.c.e.<sup>6</sup> II Kings 16:6 tells the story of how the Edomites recovered control of Elath or Ezion-Geber and with it a measure of control over the Arabah. The Edomites took advantage of the besieged Ahaz who could not defend

<sup>3</sup>Bright, pg. 480.

<sup>4</sup>Uzziah was also known as Azariah.

<sup>5</sup>Uzziah or Azariah ruled from 783 to 742 b.c.e.

<sup>6</sup>Bright, pg. 480.

simultaneously all of his possessions because of a war with the Syrians. Glueck amends II Kings 16:6 to read, "At that time the king of Edom recovered Elath for Edom, and drove out all the Judeans from Elath; and the Edomites came to Elath, and dwelt there to this day."<sup>7</sup> With this final Edomite revolt against Judah, the power of the two nations never again was sufficient to engage in any substantial military maneuvers or campaigns. Judah, who had been severely weakened, never again challenged the Edomite control of the Arabah and Elath. And Edom also began to fade from any position of power. Seemingly the two ancient rivals and enemies had sapped the strength of one another. Edom eventually dropped most of her activities in the Arabah. The Assyrians rose to a position of power about this time and extracted tribute from the nations of eastern Palestine. Although Edom had little wealth, she seems to have been fairly well off in comparison to her neighbours. The tribute paid to the Assyrians and their king, Esarhaddon, consisted of one mina of gold for Moab, two minas of gold for Ammon, ten minas of silver for Judah, and twelve minas of silver assessed to Edom.<sup>8</sup> The rule of the Assyrian king, Esarhaddon was from about 680 to 669 b.c.e.<sup>9</sup> Seemingly Edom

<sup>7</sup>Glueck, "The Boundaries of Edom," pg. 152.

<sup>8</sup>Glueck, "The Civilization of the Edomites," pg. 79.

<sup>9</sup>Georges Roux, Ancient Iraq, (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1966), pg. 456.

and Judah were of roughly equal wealth during this period of decay and decline. At about this time the culture of the people known as the Nabateans began to be a force in the area of eastern Palestine. These were a remarkable people who seem to have spread northward out of the Arabian peninsula into the lands of both Moab and Edom. Beginning about the sixth century b.c.e., the Nabateans started a kind of pressure upon the Edomites for control of the land.<sup>10</sup> The Edomites, who had not the strength to dramatically resist this pressure, could do very little to prevent the surge of the Nabateans into their land. Undoubtedly many of the native Edomite people welcomed the influx of the Nabateans. It is likely that the Nabateans did not mount a terrible military takeover of Edom. It now seems much more likely that a slower socio-economic takeover occurred. The Nabateans were stepping into a kind of power vacuum in the land of Edom and many of the native Edomites were simply absorbed into the culture and relative prosperity of the Nabateans. With the rise of the Nabateans and the decline of the Edomites we find no evidence of Edomite political strength when the Babylonian king Nabonidus made Teima his chief residence.<sup>11</sup> Nabonidus

<sup>10</sup>For an examination of the Nabatean Culture see Jean Starcky, "The Nabateans: A Historical Sketch," The Biblical Archaeologist, Vol. XVIII, No. 4 (1955), pgs. 84-106.

<sup>11</sup>Glueck, "The Boundaries of Edom," pg. 152.

ruled from about 556 to 539 b.c.e.<sup>12</sup> For all practical purposes Edom was finished as a military and political power by about 550 b.c.e. That is not to say that the people of Edom ceased to be on or about that date. They remained a lively force in the events of the area for a considerable period.

While many of the Edomite people were slowly absorbed by the culture of the Nabateans, a large group would not or could not coexist with the Nabateans. They pushed westward into the area of the Judeans. However, this migration was primarily a post-exilic phenomenon. As a kind of prelude to our investigation of this important migration we may benefit from an examination of the attitudes of the Judeans prior to and just after the exile. A valuable corpus of literature exists in the works of the exilic prophets. Their attitudes toward the Edomites may provide us with some insights as to how Judah thought of her neighbour and longtime rival, Edom.

<sup>12</sup>Bright, pg. 353.



EDOM AND THE PRE-EXILIC PROPHETS

It is generally accepted that Amos was the first of the pre-exilic prophets to ply his trade. Most commentators place Amos and his activities around 750 b.c.e. This dating makes his words and actions important for our study of Edom. By examining Amos' words relating to Edom; we can perhaps gain some insight on how a portion of the community of Judah regarded her neighbour. Amos first speaks of Edom in the first chapter. In verse 6, Amos makes reference to the Edomites in a rather indirect manner. Gaza is accused of carrying a whole population into exile and delivering up the people to the Edomites. Apparently the warriors of Gaza delivered individuals to the Edomites to serve as slaves. These slaves could either be utilized by the Edomites or resold by them to willing buyers. William Rainey Harper notes that the Edomites must have been engaged in slave trading during this period.<sup>1</sup> In this passage the Philistines of Gaza are the people being condemned. The Edomites are only considered as assisting the Philistines in their crimes.

Verse 9 of chapter one also makes reference to the Edomites receiving slaves from a foreign power. This instance sees the people of Tyre being condemned for they "delivered up a whole people to Edom." Verse 9 contains the enigmatic phrase, "and did not remember the

<sup>1</sup>William Rainey Harper, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Amos and Hosea (The International Critical Commentary), (Edinburgh; T. & T. Clark, 1905), pg. 25.

covenant of brotherhood." This apparently refers to the breaking of covenant on the part of Tyre, the nation which is being condemned in the verse. Apparently this covenant was part of a relationship that was forged between Solomon and Hiram as described in I Kings 5:12. Hiram, the king of Tyre, had struck a bargain with Solomon of Israel and perhaps a kind of covenant was agreed upon, although the text does not clearly describe the bargain as a covenant. The account in I Kings 5:12 seems to be the only instance of a possible covenant between Israel and Tyre. This argument assumes that Tyre is guilty of breaking a covenant between themselves and Israel. However, the text does not specify such a misdemeanour. It is stated only that the people of Tyre are guilty of two acts. Firstly, they carried off a whole population and delivered them up to Edom. There is no description of the people who were carried off. These unfortunates may not have been Israelites. Secondly, the text accuses Tyre of breaking a covenant of the brotherhood. Here there is no guarantee that the covenant mentioned is between Israel and Tyre.

The key passage for our consideration is found in Amos 1:11-12. Here is Amos' condemnation of the people of Edom. The passage reads thusly,

Thus says the Lord:

"For three transgressions of Edom,  
and for four, I will not revoke the  
punishment;

because he pursued his brother with  
the sword,  
and cast off all pity,  
and his anger tore perpetually,  
and he kept his wrath for ever.  
So I will send a fire upon Teman,  
and it shall devour the strong-  
holds of Bozrah."

Here is a classic condemnation of a brother by his brother. Edom has attacked Judah with swords and has cast off all pity. There is some question as to whether this passage is in reference to the Edomite participation in the fall of Jerusalem in 587 b.c.e. However, one need not cite this event as the first time Edom turned against Israel or Judah. The two countries battled viciously during the early period of the united monarchy under Solomon and David. In addition, Amos clearly lived in an earlier period than the fall of Jerusalem.

Edom is depicted in the condemnation as a vicious beast thirsting after the blood of its brother. The punishment for this heinous offense would be the destruction of the nation of Edom. The text makes reference only to the city of Bozrah and Teman. However, as Hughell E. W. Fosbroke correctly points out, the important city of Bozrah is often paralleled with Edom as a whole.<sup>2</sup> The attitude of Amos toward Edom is one of profound hatred. It is the hatred of one who feels himself to have been

<sup>2</sup>Hughell E. W. Fosbroke, The Book of Amos (The Interpreter's Bible), (Nashville: The Abingdon Press, 1956), pg. 783.

unjustly treated by a friend or a brother.

In Amos 9:12 we find another reference to Edom that seems curious when examined in light of the earlier condemnations. Amos here envisions a day when the kingdom of David will be restored and the days of old will once again return. Verse 12 notes that when the restoration takes place, the remnant of Edom will be under the control of the new nation of Israel. This passage can be approached in several ways. The traditional manner of treatment involves the assumption that this eventual treatment of Edom will be a vindication for the sins of Edom. The argument notes that even after the passage of many years, Edom will still be under the control and authority of the revitalized kingdom of David. It is assumed that this state of affairs would be the only fitting and just reward for the wicked and evil Edomites. However, one may also see this passage as describing a final reunification of the people of Edom and Israel. Amos is here speaking of a future restoration. It is possible that he is not envisioning Edom's possession by Israel as a kind of punishment. Perhaps Amos simply sees a day when the two nations will unite under a Davidic-like kingdom.

Most commentators see this final reference to Edom as being an attitude of post-exilic times. James Luther Mays claims the passage fits best into a time after

the fall of Jerusalem.<sup>3</sup> However, many commentators seem to overlook the fact that Judah and Edom were bitter rivals and enemies well before the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 b.c.e. The hatred between the two nations was such that a bitter condemnation of Edom by a prophet could easily have been delivered much earlier than 587 b.c.e.

Aside from the references to Edom in the book of the prophet Amos, there are few significant prophetic statements relating to Edom from the pre-exilic period. Hosea and Micah contain no references to Edom. The book of Isaiah makes several comments about the Edomites. However, these references are not of great importance to an understanding of the Judean and Israelite attitude toward Edom. A passing reference to Edom can be found in Isaiah 11:14. However, this comment only includes Edom in a listing of the enemies of the nation of Judah. In Isaiah 34:5-6, 9 we see a picture of the destruction which the prophet sees being delivered upon Edom by the Lord. An interesting comment in verse 6 reveals that the prophet saw the destruction of Edom by Yahweh as a kind of sacrifice. The city of Bozrah is mentioned in verse 6 and is described as the final scene of Yahweh's sacrifice of Edom.

<sup>3</sup>James Luther Mays, Amos, A Commentary, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969), pg. 164.

A fascinating and quite revealing passage can be located in Isaiah 21:11-12. This passage demonstrates some of the love/hate feelings which Judah and her people must have felt toward Edom. The passage reads,

The oracle concerning Dumah.  
 One is calling to me from Seir,  
 "Watchman, what of the night?  
 Watchman, what of the night?"  
 The watchman says:  
 "Morning comes, and also the night.  
 If you will inquire, inquire;  
 come back again."

This curious little passage has troubled commentators for centuries and can be confusing and even misleading. R. B. Y. Scott seems to have correctly interpreted the passage as a kind of plaintive appeal from the land of Seir or Edom directed toward the prophetic watchman of Judah.<sup>4</sup> Scott argues that the first line of the passage should be corrected to read, "One is lifting up the voice from Edom."<sup>5</sup> The Edomites are, in effect, asking how long the night, or the oppression, will go on. The reply to the query is ambiguous and seems to dodge a real answer. The prophet seems to be saying that the morning, or the freedom, is not yet in sight. However, the seer urges the Edomite to ask the question again. This short passage seems to place Edom in a particularly interesting light. Most all pre-exilic passages from the prophets indicate a profound hatred

<sup>4</sup>R. B. Y. Scott, The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39 (The Interpreter's Bible, Vol. 5), (Nashville: The Abingdon Press, 1956), pg. 288.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

of Edom and her people. This passage suggests that the Edomites themselves were the victims of persecution and oppression. The passage demonstrates at least some concern on the part of the watchman, prophet, or seer, for the welfare of Edom. At least the seer does not dismiss the Edomite inquiry. In point of fact, the seer urges the Edomite to make another inquiry when the picture can be more clearly perceived.

EDOM AND THE FALL OF JERUSALEM

In 587 b.c.e. Jerusalem fell to the armies of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Apparently Edom either assisted in this destruction of the city or at least participated in the looting that immediately followed. Martin Noth claims the Edomites enjoyed a temporary period of independence during this time period and therefore were capable of limited military ventures.<sup>1</sup> Several biblical passages describe Edom as rejoicing at the fall of Jerusalem. This would have outraged the Judeans who felt extremely put upon at this tragedy. In Joel 3:19 Edom is described as being desolated because of violence done to the people of Judah. Malachi 1:4 depicts Yahweh as being extremely angry with the Edomites to the point of destroying everything they would ever build. The prophet Malachi makes reference to Esau and the relationship between Esau and Jacob. The prophet notes that while Yahweh has loved Jacob and his people, the Lord has grown to hate the people of Esau. A severe and hateful activity could only have produced such a reaction against Esau and Edom on the part of Yahweh. Malachi, a post-exilic prophet, was aware of the final slap in the face dealt to Judah and Jerusalem by Edom and the Edomites. The prophet is noting in verses 2

<sup>1</sup>Martin Noth, The History of Israel, (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1960), pg. 292.



and 3 of the first chapter that Edom will know no peace for her sins against Judah.

In Ezekiel 35:15 we can see a reference to the Edomites rejoicing over the inheritance of the house of Israel. This passage once again may reflect Israelite and Judean hostility toward Edom for taking part in the looting of Jerusalem. There are few, if any, direct accusations by the Judeans or the Israelites to the effect that Edom actually participated in the plundering of Jerusalem. However, hints at such an offense do exist. And even if the Judeans and the Israelites only partially believed the accusations, they would have been greatly offended and viciously hostile toward the alleged Edomite misconduct. Whether or not the Edomites did assist the Babylonians did not, in effect, matter. The accusation of such an atrocity, even a veiled accusation, would have been sufficient to confirm an already low opinion of the character of the people of Edom in the minds of the people of Judah and Israel.

EDOM AND THE POST EXILIC-PROPHETS

The prophet Jeremiah makes mention of Edom several times in his prophecies. Most of the references to Edom are contained in a kind of listing of the enemies of Israel and Judah. Jeremiah 9:26, 25:21, 27:3 and 40:11 all contain mention of Edom. However, very little detail is provided in these passages. Seemingly the prophet is grouping together and is making little differentiation between enemies. Jeremiah lumps together all of Yahweh's foes. Although they are real nations and real people, the prophet seems to be noting that they are all a kind of collective problem for Yahweh. And this problem must be faced collectively, not as separate cases.

But in chapter 49 verses 7-22 Jeremiah gets down to specific arguments and accusations against Edom. Initially the prophet accuses Edom of having lost her wisdom and knowledge. Verse 8 contains an interesting statement urging the Edomites to turn back and flee into their homeland. Apparently this is a reference to the Edomite movement into the land of southern Judah after the fall of Jerusalem. The Edomites were being squeezed out of their homeland by the Nabatean peoples and had spilled over into Judah. Jeremiah is here warning the Edomites against seizing the land of Judah while the government and the people

were weak from the destruction at the hands of the Babylonians.

Verse 17 of chapter 49 contains a prediction that Edom will become a veritable wasteland. Jeremiah envisions a day of total destruction for Edom. Much of the oracle of Jeremiah 49:7-22 is contained in the book of Obadiah which we will discuss later in our presentation. To dwell upon Jeremiah's oracle against Edom would serve only to duplicate the remarks concerning the prophecy of Obadiah. James Philip Hyatt perhaps understates the case when he comments that for Jeremiah the Edomites were the object of a special hatred after the fall of Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup>

The book of Ezekiel contains several important passages that can perhaps shed some light upon the post-exilic attitude toward Edom by the Judeans. In Ezekiel 36:5 we find Edom being condemned for taking the land of Israel with utter contempt for the rights of ownership. Once again this passage reflects events after the fall of Jerusalem when the Edomites were literally being driven out of their land and into Judah.

In Ezekiel 25:12-14 we can see a word against Edom by the Lord. This is in a series of oracles against some of the enemies of Israel and Judah. In

<sup>1</sup>James Philip Hyatt, The Book of Jeremiah (The Interpreter's Bible, Vol. 5), (Nashville: The Abingdon Press, 1956), pg. 1118.

Ezekiel 25:1-7 is an oracle against Ammon. In 25:8-11 there can be found a condemnation of Moab. And in 25:12-14 Yahweh gets around to the sins of Edom. Unlike the previous oracles, in this passage Yahweh does not specify all of the offenses of the guilty party. In verses 12-14 Yahweh seems to be assuming that everyone will already know of and about the many sins of the Edomites. Walther Eichrodt points out that for centuries the Edomites had been the most fiercely hated of all of Israel's eastern enemies and neighbours.<sup>2</sup> And therefore the news of Edom's offenses would have been well known to the average citizen.

Generally we can safely note that the post-exilic prophets professed a severe hatred for Edom that was not felt to such an extreme by the pre-exilic prophets. The Edomite incursion into the land of southern Judah no doubt angered and frustrated the impotent Judeans. They had been stripped of any political or military muscle by the Babylonians and could not defend their land from what they believed to be an invasion of Edomites. This frustration was magnified by the Judean belief that the Edomites had assisted the Babylonians in the rape of Jerusalem. These two arguments only served to accentuate the ancient hostilities between Israel and Edom. The Israelites and the Judeans felt

<sup>2</sup>Walther Eichrodt, Ezekiel, A Commentary, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1970), pgs. 361-362.

especially bitter toward the Edomites because they felt a kind of remote kinship with their neighbours to the east through the family ties established by the brotherhood of Esau and Jacob. It is important to here note that it is all but impossible to determine if such a brotherhood was actually based upon historical fact. Despite this difficulty, we can establish that the Judean and the Israelite believed such a relationship to be based upon fact. This belief only served to harden the Judean and Israelite bitterness against the people of Edom.

EDOM AND THE BOOK OF OBADIAH

The book of Obadiah is the shortest of all the Old Testament books. It has, however, received a disproportionate share of attention from scholars and commentators. George Adam Smith has declared that this small book of but one chapter could perhaps best test our methods of criticism.<sup>1</sup> And indeed, the book is introduced without any hint of date or geographical location. At least superficially there seems to be no critical theological issue under investigation or discussion. All the little book claims to be is a vision of a prophet named Obadiah. The position of the book in the corpus of scripture offers, perhaps, a hint at the proper dating of the book. But problems of dating shall be dealt with later in our discussion. Other problems have puzzled and perplexed scholars for centuries and we shall first attempt to wrestle with some of these enigmas.

From the outset it seems clear that the book is mainly concerned with a strong prophetic outcry against Edom and the Edomite people. The destruction of Edom is called for along with a reconstitution of the nation of Israel upon Edomite territory. The text seems to make reference to historical events which have passed (verses

<sup>1</sup>George Adam Smith, The Book of the Twelve Prophets, Volume II, (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1928), pg. 163.

10ff. and 16) and often seems to predict events of the future (verses 5-8 and 19-20). Much of the previous scholarly work on Obadiah has attempted to sort out these historical allusions. Glancing at verses 10ff. and 16 we get the idea that Edom participated in the destruction of Israel in a general way and the rape of Jerusalem in particular. These events seem to have, according to the text, already occurred. These events have been identified with three specific historical occurrences by commentators. Firstly, in II Chronicles 20 is recorded a battle between Jehoshaphat and the collected armies of the Moabites, the Ammonites, the Meunites, and the Edomites. If we take this to be the historical event described in Obadiah, we can date the book during or just after the time of Jehoshaphat, who ruled from 873 to 849 b.c.e.<sup>2</sup> However, in the account of II Chronicles 20 there is no reference to any damage to the city of Jerusalem. A second possible historical event that could be matched up with the Obadianic events may be found in II Chronicles 21:8-10 and II Kings 8:20-22. This event seems to have been a successful revolt of the people of Edom against the son of Jehoshaphat, Jehoram, who ruled from 849 to 842 b.c.e.<sup>3</sup> However, once again, Jerusalem is not mentioned as playing a significant role

<sup>2</sup>Bright, pg. 480.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

in the revolt which seems to have taken place only in Edomite territory with Jehoram's army fleeing for home in II Kings 8:21. A third possibility of an historical event that can be tied to Obadiah's descriptions in verses 10ff. and 16 is the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 b.c.e. John Bright notes that the Edomites likely took part in the looting of the city.<sup>4</sup> The severity with which Obadiah attacks Edom seems to indicate a terrible breach of acceptable conduct on the part of the Edomites. To assist the Babylonians in their attack on Jerusalem would have surely provoked such an outcry.

While it seems that Obadiah is speaking of past events in verses 10ff. and 16, the prophet is apparently making predictions in verses 19-20. Obviously in this passage great portions of Israelite land will come under foreign authority. Additionally, Mount Esau, which was traditionally under Edomite control, will also fall under foreign domination. Also, Obadiah sees large numbers of Israelites in exile. These predictions seem to best fit the exilic period. Certainly they could not be dated earlier than the exile.

Another historical event which Obadiah alludes to can perhaps be found in verses 5-8. Some scholars have taken this passage to be referring to events which

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pg. 329.



had already transpired. However, most commentators have recognized the predictive nature of the passage. Simply put, the passage represents a faith in Yəhweh who will see that his people are properly avenged.

So then we can see some of the historical problems and dilemmas which arise from a study of this little book. Some have insisted upon the unity of the book. Some would separate verses 19-21 as a later addition and permit the remainder of the book to stand as a unity. Others would point out that verses 1-14 and 15b represent an original piece of work with the remainder being secondary. At least one commentator has identified the book as a collection of as few as seven separate oracles on a common theme. But increasing numbers of biblical scholars have come to agree that several important independent units make up the book of Obadiah. These units very likely refer to various historical events, as well as prophetic visions of things to come. We shall attempt to sort out these various units and assign them to particular periods and specific events.

Verse 1a serves as a kind of introduction or title for the vision of Obadiah. The vision is a fairly common method of introducing prophetic works. Amos, Isaiah, and Nahum all employ this style of introduction. Hebrew literature and prophecy usually associates a vision with a communication from Yahweh. A vision

should be separated from an ordinary or common scene or sight. The experience of a vision implies insight and perception that is the result of divine intervention. Obadiah both sees and hears in his vision and both of these senses help to comprehend the message of Yahweh.

John D. W. Watts suggests that the introduction of verse 1a might better fit into the text just before verse 2.<sup>5</sup> He goes on to suggest that an emender or editor has sometime probably transposed the two lines for the sake of clarity for the reader. That is, the lines were placed at the beginning of the book to create a title, heading, and specific introduction for the rest of the material. Additionally, most prophetic works gain their initial authority by claiming to be directly from Yahweh or by noting, "Thus says Yahweh." Obadiah begins in the relatively standard manner by noting his vision and thereby providing the necessary divine authority.

Verse 1b and c has traditionally been referred to as the audition. It serves as a point of departure for the prophetic oracles which are to follow. It also serves to authenticate the divine origin of these oracles. The content of the oracles is rather straightforward. A messenger has been sent to Obadiah from

<sup>5</sup>Watts, pg. 44.

Yahweh to call the nations to war against an, as yet, unidentified common enemy. Yahweh is in verse 1b and c simply calling Obadiah's attention to the matter. This section seems almost intentionally vague and cryptic in order perhaps to stimulate Obadiah's curiosity for interpretation and clarification. Yahweh is calling Obadiah's attention to the business of preparation for war. Naturally this implies that Israel and Judah will have a stake in the outcome of that war.

Verses 2-4 contain the identification of the common enemy. In the introduction of verse 1b Yahweh noted that the vision would concern Edom. Yahweh is, in effect, speaking both to Obadiah as well as Edom. Previously the enemy had not been identified. But in verse 2 it becomes clear that Edom is precisely identified as the enemy. The announcement of verses 2-4 revolves around three key words, "small," "despised," and "bring down."<sup>6</sup> Edom will be utterly degraded and dishonoured. Many commentators have been struck with the similarity between verses 2-4, and 5 of Obadiah and Jeremiah 49:14-16, 9. If we compare the two passages we will undoubtedly conclude that the similarity is too great to be dismissed as coincidental. Clearly one of three things has happened. Firstly, perhaps Obadiah is borrowing from Jeremiah. Secondly, possibly Jeremiah

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pg. 48.

has borrowed from Obadiah. Or thirdly, maybe both prophets are gathering material from the same original, but anonymous, source. Most commentators give credit to Jeremiah as being the originator of this oracle.<sup>7</sup> George Adam Smith, however, has given priority to Obadiah.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, John D. W. Watts concludes that the two prophets shared a common source for their material. The material seems, according to Watts, to be better preserved in Jeremiah and more original in Obadiah.<sup>9</sup> Watts' reasoning is sound and logical. Generally we can note that verses 2-4 is a short but rich passage. The imagery is keen and pointed. The object of the judgement is proclaimed. Yahweh's intentions are made painfully clear. And the prophet works to point out Edom's arrogance, false faith, and general weaknesses.

Verses 5-10 contain a sort of second announcement of judgement upon Edom. This passage serves to expand upon what has come earlier. Details of the holy war are supplied and the crime which makes the war necessary is enunciated. The first line of this passage indicates the relative seriousness of the punishment about to be delivered upon Edom. In the normal course of

<sup>7</sup>Thompson, pg. 858.

<sup>8</sup>Smith, The Book of the Twelve Prophets, Volume II, pg. 165.

<sup>9</sup>Watts, pg. 33.

events, a grape picker would cut away only the fruit from the vine and thieves would carry off into the night only what they could easily hold. But the punishment of Edom will be so utterly complete that the conquerers will carry off nearly everything. What cannot be removed will be destroyed in situ. Wrath and a pervasive sense of glee will accompany the destroying army. In verse 9 Esau is used to refer to Edom. Likely this device is here used as a kind of contrast against the usage of Jacob in verse 10. One of the most prized possessions of Edom had been her great wisdom and knowledge. Yet the disaster of the looting army would rob her of that wisdom. All of the descriptions in the passage from verses 5-10 are in the form of predictions. Thus it is difficult if not impossible to affix actual historical events to these prophetic descriptions.

The passage in verses 11-14 presents an indictment that is both stiff and formal. The actions of Edom upon Judah and Jerusalem are the focus of the passage. While the previous passage seems to be a prediction, this section seems to refer to events which have already transpired. Yahweh has taken great umbrage at the activities of Edom at the time of the exile. Indirectly what is here being stated is a kind of curious underlying attitude of togetherness on the part of the small nations of Syria and Palestine. While it was expected that these tiny

countries would squabble and bicker amongst themselves, it seems to have been expected that the nations would stand together against any outside power. The main charge against Edom is that she assisted an outsider in an attack against a member of the family, as it were. Verse 11 notes that Edom was "like one of them."

The two verses 15-16 function as a sort of theological explanation. They do not seem to be like an oracle. Yet are they broad and general in their application and serve to remind the reader of some general truths. The first of these truths is that the "Day of the Lord" is near. This day applies to not only the Edomites but to all the nations. The specific judgement against Edom is but one act of the drama which is about to be enacted with Yahweh serving as a capable director. The Day of Yahweh is a relatively common device in prophetic literature. It was a day when Yahweh would turn all his power and might against the nations in a kind of grand cleansing and terrible judgement. The day was something the prophets seem to have looked forward to, and yet feared. But for the prophets, the coming of the day was inevitable. The universal scope of the judgement serves to emphasize Yahweh's sovereignty over all of the nations. And the second line of this passage seems to emphasize the universal aspect of Yahweh's judgement. The image here employed is one of drunkenness on the part of

all the nations carried out upon God's holy mountain. This act represents a kind of rebellion against the authority and power of Yahweh. To revel upon Yahweh's holy mountain would be to slap the deity across the face in defiance. It is well worth pointing out that while Edom will feel the wrath of Yahweh, verses 15-16 serve to indict all the nations of heinous actions. All nations are guilty in the eyes of the Lord.

In the final passage of Obadiah, verses 17-21, is a standard procedure for prophetic liturgies. Obadiah concludes with an image of what would occur after the judgement of Yahweh was delivered. Obadiah is primarily concerned with the fate of Israel. Seemingly the Day of Yahweh did not make a complete end of civilization. Obadiah conceptualized the Day of Yahweh as a kind of supreme effort to set things right, to bring about a state of justice and righteousness. While the previous passages of Obadiah were concerned with the judgement and what precipitated that action, verses 17-21 seem to indicate that the judgement has been completed. In the final line of the book, the prophet seems to be summarizing his thoughts as he notes, "and the kingdom shall be the Lord's." Yahweh will, in the end, establish his reign and dominion in the flow of history. Watt summarizes his excellent commentary by explaining,

These facets of the book of Obadiah are not apparent at first glance. The book demonstrates a view that appears narrow and partial. This is because of the specialized nature of the book as a single foreign prophecy. When this single prophecy is seen within the setting in which it must originally have existed and some of the overtones from this setting are allowed to mellow and fill in the gaps around the text, the grandeur of the Old Testament's grasp of God's rule over all history, which was evidenced most clearly in Israel, his chosen people, and in his Messiah, can be seen to shine forth from almost every line.<sup>10</sup>

So then in the book of Obadiah, which seems at first to be directed only against Edom, we have seen how the attitude toward Edom hardened in the post-exilic period. Obadiah calls for a holy war to be waged against Edom. But Obadiah also called for the Day of Yahweh to be delivered upon all the nations. Edom was singled out as being particularly worthy of divine wrath. But in the end of the book of Obadiah we can find traces of a kind of reunification of the people of Jacob with the people of Esau under the rule of Yahweh. Obadiah concludes that Yahweh will assume his rightful rule over all the nations and all will be well, even in the nation of Edom.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pg. 68.



IDUMAEA

As the Edomites fled into southern Palestine to avoid the incursion of the Nabateans they encountered little resistance from the powerless Judeans. One could not in fairness term the Edomite migration into Judah an invasion. The Edomites were simply fleeing from what they felt to be an intolerable situation in their homeland. This migration probably began shortly after the fall of Jerusalem in 587 b.c.e. As the Edomites resettled in the area of southern Palestine and adjacent portions of the Negev desert, they naturally began to acclimatize themselves to their new home. In time they blended in completely with the local native populace. However, this process of cultural adaptation was probably not easy. The people and area of this section of southern Judah took on a Grecianized name known as Idumaeans or Idumaea. \*

George Livingston Robinson correctly points out that it is all but impossible to disassociate the migration of the Edomites into Judah from the incursion of the Nabateans into what was formerly Edom. He explains, "Indeed, the invasion of the latter (Nabatean) and the migration of the former (Edom) stand in the relation of cause and effect."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Robinson, pg. 366.

It is highly difficult to determine exactly to what extent the Idumaeans occupied southern Judah. We can probably assume that the people of Edom came into the land with a full realization that their homeland had surely fallen to the Nabateans and that a return was out of the question for the immediate future. The Idumaeans had come into Judah with full intention of settling permanently. But there seems to be some conflicting evidence as to the extent of the occupation. The First Book of Maccabees makes note of the fact that the nation of Idumaea contained the cities of Bethsura (4:29) and Hebron (5:65). Hebron lies to the south of Jerusalem about twenty miles. And Bethsura is but about seventeen miles south of Jerusalem. Edgar J. Goodspeed comments that the First Book of Maccabees describes events during the period from 167 to 134 b.c.e.<sup>2</sup> And in the New Testament, we discover in Mark 3:7-8 that some of the followers of Jesus came from Judah and Idumaea.

Ancient historians provide us with several important clues as to the relative boundaries of Idumaea. Didorus Siculus, who wrote from 60 to 57 b.c.e.,<sup>3</sup> notes that the Dead Sea lay along the center of the satrapy

<sup>2</sup>Edgar J. Goodspeed, The Apocrypha: An American Translation, (New York: Vintage Books, 1959), pg. 373.

<sup>3</sup>Robinson, pg. 369.

of Idumaea.<sup>4</sup> He also comments casually that the area of southern Judah was known as Idumaea as early as 312 b.c.e.<sup>5</sup> The works of Flavius Josephus, more commonly known as Josephus, provide us with a wealth of information about the land of Idumaea. The people known as the Idumaeans were active and played an important role in many of the wars of Palestine during the Roman period.<sup>6</sup> Josephus, who lived and wrote during the first century a.d., notes that Marisa was a city of the Idumaeans people.<sup>7</sup> Marisa is located about fifteen miles west and to the north of Hebron. The fortress of Masada is another feature of the Idumaeans countryside, according to Josephus.<sup>8</sup> Tekoa<sup>9</sup> and Caphartoba,<sup>10</sup> which lies not more than fifteen miles south and east of Jerusalem are also described as Idumaeans cities by Josephus. The historian leaves his reader with the distinct impression that the land of Idumaea pushed northward out of the southern region of Palestine almost as far north as the limits of Jerusalem. In

<sup>4</sup>Diodorus Siculus, Diodorus of Sicily, Vol. X, Book XIX, 98, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), pg. 99.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pg. 101.

<sup>6</sup>This period is from 63 b.c.e. to 330 a.d.

<sup>7</sup>Josephus, The Jewish War, (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1970), pg. 31.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., pg. 179.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., pg. 264.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pg. 259.

70 a.d. the Romans under Titus sought to crush a revolt of the Jews. Apparently the Jewish population of Jerusalem welcomed an offer of assistance on the part of the Idumaeans because 20,000 Idumaeen defenders were admitted into the city to assist in the defense. However, once inside the city walls the Idumaeans began a bloody program of looting and killing. The scene is described by Josephus thusly,

No one was spared by the Idumaeans, by nature most barbarous and bloodthirsty, and so knocked about by the storm that they vented their rage on the men who had shut them out, making no distinction between those who cried for mercy and those who fought. Many who reminded them of the ties of blood and begged them to reverence the Temple they shared were run through with swords. There was no room for flight, no hope of safety; they were crushed together and cut down until most of them, driven back, with no way of retreat left, relentlessly assailed by their murderous foes, and in a hopeless position, flung themselves headlong into the City, choosing for themselves a fate more pitiable, it seems to me, than the one they were fleeing from. The entire outer Temple was deluged with blood, and 8,500 corpses greeted the rising sun.<sup>11</sup>

It is most interesting that Josephus should mention in this account that the citizens of Jerusalem should appeal to the Idumaeans to have reverence for the Temple because of the ties of blood. The scene described above did not satisfy, according to Josephus, the Idumaeen thirst for blood. They ransacked the city killing

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., pg. 248.

priests and laymen alike.<sup>12</sup> But the Idumaeen traitors received no mercy at the hands of the Romans. The Idumaeans, as well as the native people of Jerusalem, all received equally harsh treatment by the armies of Rome under the leadership of Titus.

During the centuries of Idumaeen occupation of southern Judah, the native people of that land regarded the Idumaeans with a high level of suspicion. The Edomite reaction to the fall of Jerusalem in 587 b.c.e. was never really forgotten. This is not to infer that many of the Idumaeans did not blend fully and completely into the social, economic, and political life of the battered land of Judah. Undoubtedly many Idumaeans became willing and worthy proselytes to Judaism. John Hyrcanus<sup>13</sup> seems to have subdued much of the Idumaeen resistance to the Jewish way of life. He placed much of the Idumaeen land under Jewish governors and persuaded many of the Idumaeans to undergo circumcision.<sup>14</sup> However, the Idumaeen could never completely overcome the Jewish feeling to distrust and suspicion. When the Herodian princes came to a position of power in Judah from 55 b.c.e. to 93 a.d.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Robinson, pg. 370.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

their Idumaeen ancestry was an almost constant cause of bitterness, hatred, and distrust on the part of the people.<sup>15</sup> It seems an Idumaeen could never quite live down his ancestry in the eyes of a Judean or an Israelite.

According to most scholars, the Idumaeans, as a nation, faded from the stage of history with the fall of Jerusalem to the Romans in 70 a.d. George Livingstone Robinson comments that later Rabbinical writers continued to employ the term "Edom" as the most abhorred of all their enemies.<sup>16</sup> In addition, the name Idumaea continued to be used as a geographical term for the southern section of Palestine as late as the time of Saint Jerome,<sup>17</sup> who lived from about 340 until 420 a.d. For all practical purposes the people of Edom had been successfully incorporated into the populace of Judah. Their identity all but ceases by the beginning of the second century a.d.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., pg. 373.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

APPENDIX IA WORD ABOUT EDMITE POTTERY AND ARTIFACTS

Studies concerning the pottery of the ancient Edomites are all but nonexistent. Nelson Glueck collected a large quantity of pottery which was assigned to the civilization of the Edomites. We must approach this pottery analysis with caution because it was done in the 1930's. It is possible that some of Glueck's conclusions are incorrect. Nevertheless many of Glueck's statements concerning Edomite pottery seem sound and are based upon firm foundations and solid scholarship.

Much of the Edomite pottery is extremely similar to the Moabite ware of the corresponding period. For example, Glueck notes that the early bronze<sup>1</sup> pottery of Moab and Edom is so closely related as to be indistinguishable.<sup>2</sup> Characteristics of this ware include wavy ledge handles, decorative horizontal, wavy, and vertical lines and bands of facecombing.<sup>3</sup> Most of the vessels of the early bronze period seem to be plain hole-mouth jars and cooking pots.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Early bronze period was from about 3100 to 2000 b.c.e.

<sup>2</sup>Glueck, "Explorations in Eastern Palestine, II," pg. 138.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pg. 124.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

Glueck has noted that the middle bronze<sup>5</sup> period in eastern Palestine was not a time of great advancement and culture. His expedition found not a single potsherd from that period.<sup>6</sup>

During the early iron age<sup>7</sup> the civilization of the Edomites prospered and this time of plenty is reflected in the pottery. Glueck collected most of his pieces from this period. Outstanding characteristics of this pottery include a kind of button handle, a coarse white slip, and some contiguous, horizontal, somewhat irregular lines of chordal burnishing.<sup>8</sup> The Edomite method of baking early iron age pottery resulted very often in a ware which featured a gray core of well levigated, somewhat porous clay between buff surfaces.<sup>9</sup> Pottery of the early iron age was frequently decorated with a number of parallel, vertical bars of dark brown or black paint.<sup>10</sup> Glueck was apparently struck by the fact that nowhere in all of Moab or Edom did his expedition find a single ribbed loop handle with two ribs running

<sup>5</sup>Middle bronze period was from 2000 to 1500 b.c.e.

<sup>6</sup>Glueck, "Explorations in Eastern Palestine, II," pg. 138.

<sup>7</sup>Early iron period was from 1200 to 900 b.c.e.

<sup>8</sup>Glueck, "Explorations in Eastern Palestine, II," pg. 125.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.



lengthwise along the handle.<sup>11</sup> Glueck discovered a large number of pieces of various types of pottery. Most of the pieces were coarse storage jars, cooking pots, and related types. However, the early iron age of Edom did feature a number of delicate and fragile vessels. Several small, thin walled jugs were found. These pieces usually were hand burnished on the outside surface over a bistre slip, over which were the characteristic parallel horizontal lines of black paint.<sup>12</sup>

The iron II period<sup>13</sup> pottery of Edom featured many plain bowls and cooking pots with oval-section loop handles.<sup>14</sup> Glueck was highly impressed with the craftsmanship of the Edomite potters. He comments that the fine pottery of the area testified to a highly developed civilization.<sup>15</sup>

While excavating at Tell el-Kheleifeh,<sup>16</sup> Glueck stumbled across a style of pottery that initially confused and puzzled him. The ware was found

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., pg. 135.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., pg. 134.

<sup>13</sup>Iron II period was from about 900 to 587 b.c.e.

<sup>14</sup>Glueck, "Explorations in Eastern Palestine, II," pg. 136.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., pg. 137.

<sup>16</sup>The modern site of Tell el-Kheleifeh is probably the ancient city of Elath.

amongst some clearly iron II occupational levels. However, this particular ware featured a set of characteristics that seemed to place it into either the early bronze period or the chalcolithic period.<sup>17</sup> These features included a medium bake, a darkish red brown colour, handmade, and exceedingly crude general appearance. In addition, the ware contained large and small grits with a straw binding.<sup>18</sup> Most of the vessels had been used as cooking pots and they often had a knob, or horn, or vertical, or more or less horizontal and rectangular ledge and sometimes small loop handles.<sup>19</sup> After a great deal of debate, Glueck decided to place and date the pottery in the iron II period.

Glueck notes that he discovered several figurines in his explorations of eastern Palestine. The objects were judged too poor in shape to either draw or photograph. However, Glueck theorized that the figurines were similar to the Astarte figures of the several cultures of the area, including the Canaanite.<sup>20</sup>

Crystal M. Bennett mentions the discovery of

<sup>17</sup>Chalcolithic period was from about from the end of the fifth to the end of the fourth millennium.

<sup>18</sup>Nelson Glueck, "Iron II Kenite and Edomite Pottery, Perspective, Vol. XII (Spring, 1971), pg. 45.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Glueck, "Explorations in Eastern Palestine, II," pg. 136.

an Edomite shrine that may cast some light upon the religious life of the Edomites. She describes the shrine as a kind of altar with two standards on either side. A crescent is utilized and it is surmounted by a star. The crescent was the symbol, according to Bennett, of the Moon-god.<sup>21</sup> This discovery is unusual because the crescent and star are often found together but in this instance the star is situated inside the crescent. Bennett notes that normally the star is placed beside the crescent.<sup>22</sup> We know very little about the Edomite religious practices. However, the altar described by Bennett may possibly be the first recorded and discovered symbol of the Edomite god. Bennett speculates that this god may have been the national god of Edom, Qos.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup>Bennett, pg. 42.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

## APPENDIX II

A LISTING OF BIBLICAL REFERENCES RELATING TO EDOM<sup>1</sup>

<u>EDOM</u>			
Genesis	25:30	II Kings	3:8
	32:3		3:9
	36:1		3:12
	36:8		3:20
	36:16		3:26
	36:17		8:20
	36:19		8:22
	36:21		14:10
	36:31		16:6
	36:32		
	36:43	I Chronicles	1:43
			1:51
Exodus	15:15		1:54
			18:11
Numbers	20:14		18:13
	20:18		
	20:20	II Chronicles	8:17
	20:21		20:2
	20:23		21:8
	21:4		21:10
	24:18		25:19
	33:37		25:20
	34:3		
		Psalms	60:8
Joshua	15:1		60:9
	15:21		83:6
			108:9
Judges	5:4		108:10
	11:17		
	11:18	Isaiah	11:14
			34:5
I Samuel	14:47		34:6
			34:9
II Samuel	8:12		63:1
	8:14		
		Jeremiah	9:26
I Kings	9:26		25:21
	11:14		27:3
	11:15		40:11
	11:16		49:7
	22:47		49:17
			49:20
			49:22

<sup>1</sup>John W. Ellison, Nelson's Complete Concordance of the Revised Standard Version Bible, (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1957), pgs. 507-508, 542, 1671.

EDOM (continued)

<u>Lamentations</u>	4:21 4:22	II Kings	8:21 14:7 16:6
Ezekiel	16:57 25:12 25:13 25:14 27:16 32:29 35:15 36:5	I Chronicles	18:12 18:13
		II Chronicles	21:9 25:14 28:17
Daniel	11:41	Psalms	137:7
Joel	3:19	<u>ESAU</u>	
Amos	1:6 1:9 1:11 2:1 9:12	Genesis	25:25 25:27 25:28 25:29 25:30 25:32 25:34 26:34 27:1 27:5 27:6 27:11 27:15 27:19 27:21 27:22 27:24 27:30 27:32 27:34 27:36 27:37 27:38 27:41 27:42 28:6 28:8 28:9 32:3 32:4 32:6 32:8
Obadiah	1:1 1:8		
Malachi	1:4		
<u>EDOMITE</u>			
<u>Deuteronomy</u>	23:7		
I Samuel	21:7 22:9 22:18 22:22		
I Kings	11:1 11:14		
<u>EDOMITES</u>			
<u>Genesis</u>	36:9		
I Samuel	8:13 8:14		
I Kings	11:17		

ESAU (continued)

<u>Genesis</u>	32:11	Malachi	1:2
	32:13		1:3
	32:17		
	32:18	Romans	9:13
	32:19		
	33:1	Hebrews	11:20
	33:4		12:16
	33:5		
	33:8		
	33:9	<u>ESAU'S</u>	
	33:12	<u>Genesis</u>	25:26
	33:15		27:23
	33:16		28:5
	35:1		36:10
	35:29		36:12
	36:1		36:13
	36:2		36:14
	36:4		36:17
	36:5		36:18
	36:6		
	36:8		
	36:9	<u>SEIR</u>	
	36:10	<u>Genesis</u>	14:6
	36:14		32:3
	36:15		33:14
	36:19		33:16
	36:40		36:8
	36:43		36:9
			36:20
Deuteronomy	2:4		36:21
	2:5		36:30
	2:8		
	2:12	Numbers	24:18
	2:22		
	2:29	Deuteronomy	1:2
			1:44
Joshua	24:4		2:1
			2:4
I Chronicles	1:34		2:5
	1:35		2:8
			2:12
Jeremiah	49:8		2:22
	49:10		2:29
			33:2
Obadiah	1:6		
	1:8	Joshua	11:17
	1:9		12:7
	1:18		15:10
	1:19		24:4
	1:21		

SEIR (continued)

Judges	5:4
I Chronicles	1:38 4:42
II Chronicles	20:10 20:22 20:23 25:11 25:14
Isaiah	21:11
Ezekiel	35:2 35:3 35:7 35:15

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