

**PROPHECY AS A PROOF OF THE INSPIRATION OF  
THE BIBLE: THE WITNESS OF THE PROPHETS  
CONCERNING JACOB AND ESAU**

by

**F. Furman Kearley, Ph.D.**

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**INTRODUCTION**

One of the most powerful examples of fulfilled prophecy (and thus one of the most striking evidences for the Bible's inspiration) is to be found in the contrasting prophecies concerning Jacob and his descendants on the one hand, and Esau and his descendants on the other. The prophet Malachi vividly painted the contrast as follows: "'Was not Esau Jacob's brother?' saith Jehovah: 'yet I loved Jacob; but Esau I hated, and made his mountains a desolation, and gave his heritage to the jackals of the wilderness'" (Malachi 1:2-3).

While these two brothers were still in the womb of their mother Rebekah, before they had done good or evil, God made a choice and revealed this choice to their mother—the elder should serve the younger (Genesis 25:23). During their lives, Jacob chose to serve and follow the Lord, while Esau was a profane person who followed a course of rebellion against God. Each brother became the father of a great nation. Jacob became the father of the twelve patriarchs and through them the father of the nation of Israel. Esau became the father of the nation of Edom (Genesis 36). After Israel returned from Egypt and settled in Canaan, the nations lived as neighbors. However, most of their history was marked by conflict and hostility against each other. This hostility reached its climax when Edom aided Israel's enemies, the Babylonians, by standing in the escape routes, catching the Israelites who tried to escape, and delivering these Israelites to their enemies (Obadiah 14). God, through His prophets, foretold the eventual fate of both nations. The contrast of these prophecies and their fulfillment is both enlightening and faith building.

**THE PERPETUAL EXISTENCE OF THE HEBREW NATION**

Prophecies concerning the fate of the Hebrew nation are contained in two amazing chapters in Deuteronomy (28) and Leviticus (26). In addition, many other statements concerning the Israelites' fate are scattered throughout the Old Testament, especially in the prophets. However, this study is concerned

principally with the prophecies about the perpetual existence of the Hebrew nation. Listed below are some of the significant statements concerning the dispersion of the Israelites, the nature of their treatment through the centuries, and the assurance of their continued existence:

1. Jehovah will bring thee, and thy king whom thou shalt set over thee, unto a nation that thou hast not known, thou nor thy fathers; and there shalt thou serve other gods, wood and stone. And thou shalt become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword, among all the peoples whither Jehovah shall lead thee away (Deuteronomy 28:36-37).

2. And Jehovah will scatter thee among all peoples, from the one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth; and there thou shalt serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou nor thy fathers, even wood and stone. And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, and there shall be no rest for the sole of thy foot: but Jehovah will give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and pining of soul; and thy life shall hang in doubt before thee; and thou shalt fear night and day, and shalt have no assurance of thy life (Deuteronomy 28:64-66).

3. And you will I scatter among the nations, and I will draw out the sword after you: and your land shall be desolation, and your cities shall be a waste....

And yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them, neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly, and to break my covenant with them; for I am Jehovah their God (Leviticus 26:33,44).

4. For I am with thee, saith Jehovah, to save thee: for I will make a full end of all the nations whither I have scattered thee, but I will not make a full end of thee; but I will correct thee in measure, and will in no wise leave thee unpunished (Jeremiah 30:11).

5. If these ordinances depart from before me, saith Jehovah, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever. Thus saith Jehovah: If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, then will I also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith Jehovah (Jeremiah 31:36-37; see also Jeremiah 46:27-28).

6. Behold, the eyes of the Lord Jehovah are upon the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from off the face of the earth; save that I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob, saith Jehovah. For, lo, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all the nations, like as grain is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least kernel fall upon the earth (Amos 9:8-9).

For many centuries, careful and concerned Bible students have noted the past fulfillment of these prophecies as well as the fact that they continue to be fulfilled generation after generation. Commenting on the fact that the Hebrew people would find no ease and no rest for the sole of their foot (Deuteronomy 28:65), Archibald Alexander has commented:

How exactly has this been verified in the case of this unhappy people, even to this day! There is scarcely a country in Europe from which they have not been banished, at one time or another. To say nothing of many previous scenes of bloodshed and banishment, of the most shocking kind, through which great multitudes of this devoted people passed in Germany, France, and Spain, in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries; eight hundred thousand Jews, are said by the Spanish historian, to have been banished from Spain, by Ferdinand and Isabella. And how often, when tolerated by government they have suffered by the tumults of the people, it is impossible to enumerate (n.d., p. 136).

The same author noted further:

In every country, the Jews are hated and despised. They have been literally “a proverb and a by-word.” Mohammedans, Heathens, and Christians, however they may differ in other things, have been agreed in vilifying, abusing, and persecuting the Jews. Surely the judgments visited on this peculiar people, have been wonderful and of long continuance. For nearly eighteen hundred years, they have been in this miserable state of banishment, dispersion, and persecution (p. 137).

Another astute student of these promises has observed:

And this peculiar people, living in one of the smallest countries of the earth, has been scattered throughout the world, has become a wanderer, without a home, without a land. Like Cain, they wander from nation to nation. Though without a land they are still a nation. Other nations have passed away; the Jewish nation has been preserved. They are among all the nations and yet not reckoned among the nations (Gaebelein, n.d., p. 121).

Concerning the uniqueness of the preservation of the Jewish nation, Milman, in his *History of the Jews*, commented:

Massacred by thousands, yet springing up again from their undying stock, the Jews appear at all times and in all regions. Their perpetuity, their national immortality, is at once the most curious problem to the political inquirer; to the religious man a subject of profound and awful admiration (as quoted in Gaebelein, n.d., p. 122).

This section on the amazing preservation of the Jews may be concluded by a lengthy but meaningful quotation from Thomas Newton:

The preservation of the Jews is really one of the most signal and illustrious acts of divine providence. They are dispersed among all nations, and yet they are not confounded with any. The drops of rain which fall, nay the great rivers which flow into the ocean, are soon mingled and lost in that immense body of waters. and the same in all human probability would have been the fate of the Jews, they would have been mingled and lost in the common mass of mankind; but on the contrary they flow into all parts of the world, mix with all nations, and yet keep separate from all. They still live as a distinct people, and yet they nowhere live according to their own laws, nowhere elect their own magistrates, nowhere enjoy the full exercise of their religion. Their solemn feasts and sacrifices are limited to one certain place, and that hath been now for many ages in the hands of strangers and aliens, who will not suffer them to come thither. No people have continued unmixed so long as they have done, not only of those who have set forth colonies into foreign countries, but even of those who have abided in their own country. The northern nations have come in swarms into the more southern parts of Europe; but where are they now to be discerned and distinguished? The Gauls went forth in great bodies to seek their fortune in foreign parts but what traces or footsteps of them are now remaining anywhere? In France, who can separate the race of the ancient Gauls from the various other people, who from time to time have settled there? In Spain, who can distinguish exactly between the first possessors the Spaniards, and the Goths, and the Moors, who conquered and kept possession of the country for some ages? In England, who can pretend to say with certainty which families are derived from the ancient Britons, and which from the Romans, or Saxons, or Danes, or Normans? The most ancient and honourable pedigrees can be traced up only to a certain period, and beyond that there is nothing but conjecture and uncertainty, obscurity and ignorance: but the Jews can go up higher than any nation, they can even deduce their pedigree from the beginning of the world. They may not know from what particular tribe or family they are descended, but they know certainly that they all sprung from the stock of Abraham. And yet the contempt with which they have been treated, and the hardships which they have undergone in almost all countries, should, one would think, have made them desirous to forget and renounce their original; but they profess it; they glory in it: and after so many wars, massacres, and persecutions, they still subsist, they still are very numerous: and what

but a supernatural power could have preserved them in such a manner as none other nation upon earth hath been preserved? (1974, pp. 133-134).

Anyone acquainted with the events of the twentieth century (and the treatment of the Jews during this century) knows that the prophecies quoted from the Old Testament and written more than 2,500 years ago sound as if they are the history of the Jewish people in our present century. The word "Jew" frequently is used in a contemptible sense and truly is a byword and a hiss. The Jews have not been at ease in the countries of their habitation even during this century. In the United States, the freest of countries, anti-Semitism has been a significant problem for the Jewish people. Jews have not been allowed to be members of certain clubs and organizations. They frequently have been vilified. In Europe, before and during World War II, the Jewish people were treated worse than animals. Eventually, 6,000,000 of them were killed by Hitler and his henchmen. Though being allowed to return and establish the State of Israel in 1948, the Jews have faced repeated wars and skirmishes. They have faced an uncertain future virtually every day, with great hostility manifested toward them by the Arab countries. Within the last few years, much has been said about the ill treatment of the Jews in Russia. Certainly the Jews are not at ease in any place where they live.

However, despite the contempt, hatred, and ill-treatment that the Jews have received, they continue to exist as a distinct people though scattered in countries throughout the world. They maintain an ethnic identity unparalleled by any other people. Their synagogues are to be found in every country and in all cities of reasonable size. They have not denied their ethnic origin or their religious faith in order to avoid persecution. They have not mixed with other people but have maintained a separate existence despite what would seem to be insurmountable obstacles.

In light of the above facts and observations, no honest, inquiring person could deny logically that the prophets (from Moses on) who spoke concerning the fate of the Jews were inspired of God. The history and perpetual existence of the Jews is a strong, undeniable evidence of the inspiration of the Bible.

## **THE PERPETUAL DESOLATION OF EDOM**

In contrast to the prophecies concerning the perpetual existence of the Jews as the descendants of Jacob, there stand the prophecies concerning the perpetual desolation and the annihilation of the Edomites, the descendants of Esau, Jacob's brother. An examination of these prophecies is most fruitful as an evidence of the inspiration of God's Word.

### **Specific Prophecies Against Edom**

Specific prophecies against Edom are contained in Isaiah 34:1-15; Jeremiah 49:7-22; Ezekiel 25:12-14; Ezekiel 35:1-15; Amos 1:11-12; and Obadiah 1-21. While some of the statements in these prophecies are of a general nature, many specific prophecies are to be found. These may be summarized as follows:

#### **ISAIAH 34:1-15**

1. God's word shall come down upon Edom and there shall be a great slaughter in that land (verses 5 and 6).
2. The streams of Edom shall be turned into pitch and the dust into brimstone, that is, it shall become very dry and parched (verse 9).
3. The land will lie waste from generation to generation, none shall pass through it (verse 10).
4. The pelican, the porcupine, the owl, and the raven will make their habitat there (verse 11).
5. Thorns, thistles, and nettles will come out there and the place will be a habitation of jackals, ostriches, and other wild beasts (verse 13-15).

#### **JEREMIAH 49:7-22**

1. God will bring calamity upon Esau's descendants. He will uncover his secret places so he cannot hide himself. His seed is destroyed and he is not (verses 8-10).
2. Edom shall drink of the cup of the wine of God's wrath (verse 12).
3. Bozrah, one of Edom's cities, shall become an astonishment, a reproach, a waste, and a curse (verse 13).
4. All the cities of Edom shall be perpetual waste (verse 13).
5. God prophesies that though Edom dwells in the clefts of the rocks and though his fortress is as high as the eagle's nest, God will bring it down to destruction (verse 16).
6. Edom shall become an astonishment and all passing by shall hiss at its plagues (verse 17).
7. It will come to pass that no man shall dwell there (verse 18).

### **EZEKIEL 25:12-14**

1. God promises to make Edom desolate from Teman even unto Dedan (verse 13).
2. God says He will put His vengeance upon Edom by the hand of His people, Israel (verse 14).

### **EZEKIEL 35:1-15**

1. God says He will make Mount Seir or Edom a desolation and an astonishment (verse 3).
2. He will lay the cities of Edom waste and they shall be desolate (verse 4).
3. God says, "I will make thee a perpetual desolation and thy cities shall not be inhabited; and ye shall know that I am Jehovah" (verse 9).
4. God plainly connects the evidence of His existence and power with the fulfillment and accomplishment of His prophecies against Edom (verses 11-12).

### **OBADIAH 1-21**

1. God says of Edom: "The pride of thy heart hath deceived thee, O thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high; that saith in his heart, Who shall bring me down to the ground? Though thou mount on high as the eagle, and though thy nest be set among the stars, I will bring thee down from thence, saith Jehovah" (verses 3-4).
2. God indicates that though robbers would steal only till they had enough and grape-gatherers would leave some gleanings, yet the enemies of Esau will leave nothing when they destroy the land (verses 5-9).
3. God promises "For the violence done to thy brother Jacob, shame shall cover thee, and thou shalt be cut off forever" (verse 10).
4. God prophesies that the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions, which usually is taken to mean that they will possess the territory of Edom (verses 17-21).
5. God affirms "There shall not be any remaining to the house of Esau" (verse 18).

The above statements are sufficiently specific to provide the basis for an examination of fulfilled prophecy. All of these prophecies were uttered before the end of the sixth century B.C. Therefore, if specific fulfillments can be observed well this side of that time frame, there can be no denial of the divine inspiration of the prophets who uttered these messages.

### **The History Of The People And Territory Of Edom**

As indicated above, the Edomites and the Israelites were descendants of the twin brothers, Jacob and Esau. Throughout the centuries, from the return of the Israelites out of Egyptian bondage until their captivity by Babylon, there seems to have been intermittent hostility between Edom and Israel. The Edomites

would not allow Moses and the children of Israel to pass through their land (Numbers 20:14-21). David subdued the Edomites as he established his kingdom (2 Samuel 8:13-14). Edom successfully revolted against Joram, king of Judah, and became independent again (2 Kings 8:20-22). After an independence of about 50 years, Amaziah of Judah reconquered them, and this conquest was extended even further by Uzziah (2 Kings 14:7,22; 2 Chronicles 25:5-15). About 735 B.C., Syria took Edom from Ahaz, king of Judah (2 Kings 16:5-6). Then Edom seems to have suffered the fate of her neighbors as they all became subject to Assyria and paid heavy tribute (Pritchard, 1950, p. 282). At times, Edom seems to have joined the enemies of Judah in capturing the Israelites as they fled from their enemies and delivering them back into their opponents' hands (Obadiah 10-14). Concerning the fate of Edom, after becoming subject to Assyria, Cohen observed:

For the next hundred years Edom was a vassal of Assyria; in 711 and 701 it joined with the nearby states, with the backing of Babylon, but on each occasion the coalition was quickly broken up.

As a result of these wars and the necessity of paying heavy tributes, the prosperity of Edom, which had been at its height in the thirteenth-eighth centuries B.C., declined rapidly in the next two hundred years. The Edomites submitted quietly to the Babylonian yoke (604 B.C.). When Nebuchadnezzar besieged and captured Jerusalem in 586, the Edomites joined his forces and exulted at the destruction of their ancient enemies (Psalms 137:7; Lamentations 4:21-22; Obadiah 10-16). After the deportation of most of Judah to Babylon and the flight of the remainder after the assassination of Gedaliah, the Edomites moved northward into S. Judah, with Hebron as their capital; this is the Idumea of the postexilic period. During the Persian period, the Nabateans began pressing into the Edomite territory from the south and east, and by the fourth century they had built up a territory of their own with Petra as their capital. Many Edomites migrated into Idumea, but many others seem to have stayed and assimilated with the Nabateans (1962, 2:26).

The Edomites are absent from the pages of history for the rest of the Persian period and during the Greek Empire. The next mention of them is during the Maccabean period. In Greek literature, they came to be called Idumeans. Judas Maccabeus defeated the Idumeans in 164 B.C. (1 Maccabees 5:1-5; Josephus, n.d., 12.8.1). Josephus recorded information concerning the Edomites that clearly indicated the fulfillment of Ezekiel's prophecy—that God would lay His vengeance upon Edom by the hand of His people, Israel (Ezekiel 25:14).

Hyrchanus also captured the Idumean cities of Adora and Marisa, and after subduing all the Idumeans, permitted them to remain in their country so long as they had themselves circumcised and were willing to observe the laws of the Jews. And so, out of attachment to the land of their fathers, they submitted to circumcision and to making their manner of life conform in all other respects to that of the Jews. And from that time on they have continued to be Jews (12.9.1; 15.7.9)

The above facts quoted from Josephus also establish the fulfillment of Obadiah 17-18. The Hebrew text indicates that the Jews “shall possess their possessions.” The Septuagint says, “The house of Jacob shall take for an inheritance those who took them for an inheritance.” The Vulgate seems to agree with the Septuagint. The commentators are agreed that the possessions referred to are those of the enemy represented by the Edomites. Thus, under John Hyrcanus the Jews regained the possession of territory they once owned, including the Edomite land that they possessed during the days of David but had lost when the Edomites rebelled (Deane, 1950, 14:5).

The Edomites now were a part of the Jewish nation for nearly two centuries. Herod himself was an Idumean. The last mention in history of the Edomites or Idumeans was in connection with their barbarous conduct in the city of Jerusalem just before its fall. Along with the Zealots, the Idumeans fell upon and butchered the people in Jerusalem as though they had been a herd of unclean animals (Josephus, 4.5.1-5). Concerning this significant event in history, David Higgins stated: “After the massacre of the Jews, the Idumeans returned home. But with the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. the children of Esau disappear as a separate people from the stage of recorded history.”

The territory formerly occupied by the Edomites was taken over beginning in the fourth century B.C. by a nomadic people called the Nabateans. Their main stronghold became Petra, which most scholars identify with Sela of the Old Testament (Obadiah 3) [Pfeiffer, 1966, p. 445]. The Nabateans established a vast commercial empire, flourished throughout the Roman period, and engaged in extensive building activity in Petra by carving structures out of the stone cliffs. But Roman power began to decline in the third century A.D., and Petra began to sink into obscurity. According to Pfeiffer:

During the seventh century, Petra was engulfed in the expansive movement of Islam. In the twelfth century, a crusader fortress was built but when this outpost fell before the Saracen Saladin in 1188-89, Petra disappeared from historical records until its rediscovery in 1812 (1966, p. 446).

Commenting on the decline of the Nabatean Empire and Petra, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* observed:

In A.D. 106, Arabia Petraea (“Arabia belonging to Petra”) was absorbed into the Roman Empire, and the native dynasty came to an end. When the city was more prosperous than ever, at the time of Alexander Severus (A.D. 222-235), the issue of coinage came suddenly to an end. This was possibly due to a desert raid on a large scale, associated, perhaps, with the neo-Persian power under the Sassanid dynasty. Meanwhile, Palmyra was growing in importance, and attracted much of the Arabian trade away from Petra, and the latter declined (1957, 17:652).

## ESTIMATES CONCERNING THE FULFILLED PROPHECIES

Students of the history of Edom and the prophecies concerning it seem to agree that the fate predicted by the prophets for Edom has indeed come to pass. Isaiah predicted that the land would become dry, desolate, and a habitation of wild beasts and serpents. George Smith provided an anthology of comments concerning the ruins of the territory of Edom and Petra:

Captain Mangles, who visited these ruins, says, that when surveying the scenery of Petra, "The screaming of the eagles, hawks, and owls, who were soaring over our heads in considerable numbers, seemingly annoyed at anyone approaching their lonely habitation, added much to the singularity of the scene." It was also declared, "It shall be a habitation for dragons, (or serpents). I laid his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness." Dr. Shaw represented the Land of Edom, and the desert of which it now forms a part, "As abounding with a variety of lizards and vipers, which are very numerous and troublesome." And Volney relates that "the Arabs, in general, avoid the ruins of the cities of Idumea on account of the enormous scorpions with which they swarm." So plentiful, as observed by Mr. Cory, "are the scorpions in Petra, that, though it was cold and snowy, we found them under the stones, sometimes two under one stone!" The sheik, and his brother, who accompanied Mr. Cory, assured him that "both lions and leopards are often seen in Petra, and on the hills immediately beyond it, but that they never descend into the plain beneath" (1975, pp. 221-222).

Higgins concluded his study of the Edom prophecies as follows:

Again and again the desolation of Edom is foretold. In the time of the prophets such a prediction seemed most unlikely of fulfillment. Even after the Edomites had been pushed out, the Nabateans developed a flourishing civilization that lasted for centuries. But God had said, "I will lay thy cities waste." Today the land stands deserted, a mute testimony to the sure Word of the Lord. Petra is a remarkable example of the literal fulfillment of this prophecy. This great ancient capital with its theater seating 4,000, its temples, its altars and its monuments is now silent and alone, decaying with the passage of time (1960, p. 55).

On the one hand, the territory of Edom lies desolate and abandoned, her wasted cities serving as a dwelling place for wild animals. Only scholars and curious tourists visit the ruins. The Edomites themselves have vanished from world history and have been unheard of for more than 1,900 years. The prophecies concerning Edom literally have been fulfilled in detail after detail. Edom is a perpetual desolation.

On the other hand, the Hebrew people manifest a perpetual existence. In spite of wars, persecution, and hideous atrocities executed against them, they continue to exist. In spite of dispersion throughout the world in hundreds of different cultures and societies, they maintain their peculiar identity. The prophecies of the perpetual existence of the Jews have been fulfilled.

The foregoing study presents amazing evidence that the Old Testament prophets, were inspired of God. No human beings, depending upon their own unaided human reasoning, possibly could have foretold even a century in advance the fate of two nations or peoples such as the Edomites and the Israelites. Yet the prophecies concerning these people have spanned more than 2,500 years and continue to be in the process of fulfillment today. Truly, the honest inquirer, in the face of such evidence, must cry out, "How can I help but believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God!"

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