

The God of Justice and Hope
The Book of Obadiah
Sunday, August 20th, 2023

Scripture

Obadiah 1-4, 20-21

[1] The vision of Obadiah.

Thus says the Lord GOD concerning Edom:

We have heard a report from the LORD,

and a messenger has been sent among the nations:

“Rise up! Let us rise against her for battle!”

[2] Behold, I will make you small among the nations;

you shall be utterly despised.

[3] The pride of your heart has deceived you,

you who live in the clefts of the rock,

in your lofty dwelling,

who say in your heart,

“Who will bring me down to the ground?”

[4] Though you soar aloft like the eagle,

though your nest is set among the stars,

from there I will bring you down,

declares the LORD.

[20] The exiles of this host of the people of Israel

shall possess the land of the Canaanites as far as Zarephath,

and the exiles of Jerusalem who are in Sepharad

shall possess the cities of the Negeb.

[21] Saviors shall go up to Mount Zion

to rule Mount Esau,

and the kingdom shall be the LORD’s.

Pray

Introduction

You may or may not know this, but Obadiah is the shortest book of the Bible at only 21 verses long. And the bulk of those 21 verses (about 17) are concerned with the judgement, sin, and destruction of a particular people, the people of Edom.

Now, even though it can be hard to date this book we can gather from the internal information that it was written after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. (This is part of Edom’s sin as we will see) and before Edom’s destruction in 553 B.C.

The primary author is identified as Obadiah. And though we don't know a lot about him we do know that he was a prophet. Which is why it says in the first part of verse 1 ***“The vision of Obadiah.”*** Obadiah had received a vision from God, and it was his job, as a prophet, to make it known.

But who was he speaking to? Who was the primary audience? Was it the people of Edom to warn them of their coming destruction like Jonah did with the Ninevites? Or was it someone else?

If we look at most of the other prophets, with the exception of Jonah, they are all giving their prophecies, **which include judgements on other nations**, to either the people of Israel in the Northern Kingdom or to the people of Judah in the Southern Kingdom.

Add to this the fact that Obadiah ends his whole prophecy with the hope of the exiles returning to the promise land in verses 19-21, and it becomes clear that the primary audience is God's people who have been exiled by Babylon.

But that still doesn't help us to understand why God is putting such an intense focus on Edom. In order to do that, we need a little history lesson about Edom and their relationship with Judah so that we can understand why God is pronouncing such a harsh judgement against them.

And I will try to keep this as short and succinct as possible.

It all began back in Genesis 25:19-26 where Rebekah, Isaac's wife, was about to give birth to two sons, Esau and Jacob. But before they were born, they seemed to be struggling in her womb. So she inquired of the Lord, and he said to her in Genesis 25:23:

***“Two nations are in your womb,
and two peoples from within you shall be divided;
the one shall be stronger than the other,
the older (Esau) shall serve the younger (Jacob).”***

From there a series of events happen that put Esau in a place where he hates and is against his brother. Jacob makes Esau sell him his birthright for food in Genesis 25:29-34. And when their father Isaac is about to die in Genesis 27, he wants to bless Esau as his heir, but Jacob tricks his father into blessing him instead. Which made Esau not only hate Jacob, but also create a plan to kill him.

This of course made Jacob flee. In the process of running away he ends up wrestling with a man whom we find out is God himself, and at the end of their wrestling God changes his name from Jacob to Israel. After that Jacob has 12 sons who become the eventual nation of Israel.

Now, even though Jacob and Esau semi-reconcile in Genesis 34, if we fast forward to Genesis 36 we get a whole chapter just devoted to Esau's descendants. And we learn at the beginning of that genealogy that Esau and his descendants are the nation of **Edom**.

So Jacob is associated with Israel and Esau is associated with Edom. And all throughout their history, as the Lord said to Rebekah, they have been struggling against one another.

We get a picture of this struggle in 2 Samuel 8:11-14 when it says of David:

[11] These also King David dedicated to the LORD, together with the silver and gold that he dedicated from all the nations he subdued, [12] from Edom, Moab, the Ammonites, the Philistines, Amalek, and from the spoil of Hadadezer the son of Rehob, king of Zobah.

[13] And David made a name for himself when he returned from striking down 18,000 Edomites in the Valley of Salt. [14] Then he put garrisons in Edom; throughout all Edom he put garrisons, and all the Edomites became David's servants. And the LORD gave victory to David wherever he went.

David and the people of Jacob (Israel) were at war with the Edomites. And David and his army not only struck down 18,000 Edomites, but he also made them his servants and slaves which fulfills the last line of God's words to Rebekah which is that the older (Esau or Edomites) will serve the younger (Jacob or Israel).

But that slave and master relationship doesn't last. Eventually in the days of Jehoram King of Judah, the Edomites rebel against Israel. As it says in 2 Kings 8:20-22a

*[20] In his days Edom revolted from the rule of Judah and set up a king of their own. [21] Then Joram passed over to Zair with all his chariots and rose by night, and he and his chariot commanders struck the Edomites who had surrounded him, but his army fled home. [22a] **So Edom revolted from the rule of Judah to this day.***

And this rebellion and adversarial relationship has been going on ever since.

Which brings us to the present reality of the book of Obadiah. Judah (who is referred to as Jacob in verse 10) and Edom are still struggling with one another, but at this moment Edom has the upper hand.

Judah and Jerusalem have been ransacked by the Babylonians, and Edom (Esau's descendants and Judah's kinsman) have not only rejoiced at their destruction, but have committed violence against God's people as they aided the Babylonians in this war against Judah.

And God in response speaks to his people through Obadiah. He speaks to them so that he can expose Edom's wrongs, pronounce judgement on them, and at the same time give hope to his exiled people that he will in fact restore them to their land.

So now that you understand the historical background of this book, we are set to actually look at what is contained in this prophecy. And as we walk through these 21 verses, we will learn the following things:

1. **God humbles the proud (V. 1-4)**
2. **God repays those who are evil (V. 5-9)**
3. **God brings evil deeds to light (V. 11-14)**
4. **God will be victorious over his enemies, including Edom (V. 15-16)**
5. **God gives hope to scattered exiles (V. 17-21)**

And though each of these points won't be super long I hope that we will not only see the grandeur, power, justice, and mercy of our great God. But that we will see the present and future hope that God has for us who are strangers, aliens, and exiles in this world, while also realizing that this judgement against Edom also has application and warning for us as God's people.

1. **God humbles the proud (V. 1-4)**

[1] The vision of Obadiah.

Thus says the Lord GOD concerning Edom:

We have heard a report from the LORD,

and a messenger has been sent among the nations:

“Rise up! Let us rise against her for battle!”

[2] Behold, I will make you small among the nations;

you shall be utterly despised.

[3] The pride of your heart has deceived you,

you who live in the clefts of the rock,

in your lofty dwelling,

who say in your heart,

“Who will bring me down to the ground?”

[4] Though you soar aloft like the eagle,

though your nest is set among the stars,

from there I will bring you down,

declares the LORD.

The first thing we learn in this prophecy is that some sort of messenger has been sent out with a message against Edom. Most commentators believe that this was some sort of angel who was sent out by God. And the message that went out was for the surrounding nations to “Rise up for battle.” **Meaning that God was calling the surrounding nations to come and fight against Edom.**

In fact, this message against Edom was so important to communicate to God's people that it was also picked up by the prophet Jeremiah in Jeremiah 49:14 which says:

*[14] I have heard a message from the LORD,
and an envoy has been sent among the nations:
“Gather yourselves together and come against her,
and rise up for battle!”*

But why? Why is God specifically and emphatically calling for nations to rise up for battle against Edom? There of course are many reasons, but the first we will encounter is their pride. As it says in verses 3 of Obadiah.

*[3] The pride of your heart has deceived you,
you who live in the clefts of the rock,
in your lofty dwelling,
who say in your heart,
“Who will bring me down to the ground?”*

The Edomites were a people whom God had given Mount Seir as their inheritance according to Deuteronomy 2:22.

And because they lived on a mountain, in their pride they thought they were indestructible. As God was bringing destruction upon Judah through the Babylonians these people in the mountains thought that they were safe and didn't believe that anybody could hurt them.

They truly thought they were invincible.

But God has another message for them. He says in Obadiah 2 and 4:

*[2] Behold, I will make you small among the nations;
you shall be utterly despised.*

*[4] Though you soar aloft like the eagle,
though your nest is set among the stars,
from there I will bring you down,
declares the LORD.*

The Edomites might believe they are invincible or indestructible because they live in a high mountain, but the truth is that they cannot escape the God of the universe. As Mary sings in Luke 1:52:

*[52] he has brought down the mighty from their thrones
and exalted those of humble estate;*

And just as God will make the Edomites small and will bring them down in their pride, so too will God humble all those who oppose his kingdom and his people.

Those outside the church who pridefully see no need of God, or who believe they are wise in their own eyes, or who look down upon the church because they believe that religion is the cause of all the evil in the world.

Or those inside the church who elevate themselves above their brothers and sisters. Maybe they believe their theology is superior or they feel like they are godlier than someone else, or they believe that they know what the church needs even more than its elected leaders.

The God of heaven speaks against all these forms of pride and says, ***“from there I will bring you down declares the Lord.”*** God will and does humble the proud.

2. God repays those who are evil (V. 5-9)

Obadiah 5–9

*[5] If thieves came to you,
if plunderers came by night—
how you have been destroyed!—
would they not steal only enough for themselves?*

*If grape gatherers came to you,
would they not leave gleanings?*

*[6] How Esau has been pillaged,
his treasures sought out!*

*[7] All your allies have driven you to your border;
those at peace with you have deceived you;
they have prevailed against you;
those who eat your bread have set a trap beneath you—
you have no understanding.*

*[8] Will I not on that day, declares the LORD,
destroy the wise men out of Edom,
and understanding out of Mount Esau?*

*[9] And your mighty men shall be dismayed, O Teman,
so that every man from Mount Esau will be cut off by slaughter.*

Obadiah opens this section with two contrasting images. Thieves and grape gatherers. And when thieves come, they only steal what they can carry, and when grape gatherers come they leave gleanings, which means that they leave grapes behind.

Now this may seem like it is strange for God to put these images in the prophecy, but if you look at verse 6 it all makes sense.

*[6] How Esau has been pillaged,
his treasures sought out!*

The point here is that if it were simply thieves coming against Edom there would be treasure left, and if it were merely grape gatherers coming to them there would be fruit left.

But no, the living, holy, and mighty God is coming against them. Which means that they are going to be ransacked and pillaged, and all of their treasures, everything they own and hold dear, including all of their men, will be taken from them. As it says in verse 9:

***[9] And your mighty men shall be dismayed, O Teman,
so that every man from Mount Esau will be cut off by slaughter.***

But this question comes up again. Why? Why is God so mad at Edom and so bent on destroying them? Though we will learn more about their crimes in the next point we can begin to see their evil and wrongdoing right in the middle of this section of verses. As it says in verse 7:

***[7] All your allies have driven you to your border;
those at peace with you have deceived you;
they have prevailed against you;
those who eat your bread have set a trap beneath you—
you have no understanding.***

Who were Edom's allies? It was Babylon. They had made a pact with the Babylonians against the people of Judah. And in what one can only call an ironic twist, or maybe poetic justice, it is these same Babylonians who will eventually invade and destroy Edom in 553 B.C.

Can you imagine how good it would have been for God's exiled people to hear this. Edom, your enemy, who allied themselves with your captures will eventually be destroyed by them.

I don't know about you, but this both gives me hope and makes me pause at same time.

It gives me hope that every assault that comes against the church will eventually be put down because God repays evil.

In fact, right now, we can see this very clearly happening in our culture. Those who have fought so hard for gender equality and have labeled conservative Christians as a bigots within this culture war are finding themselves in a different war.

They are now fighting amongst themselves over whether or not transgender men and women can participate in sports within their preferred gender.

Those who were allies for evil have now turned against one another. And God in his justice will repay them according to their deeds. As he says in Romans 12:19:

***[19] Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written,
"Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."***

But it also gives me pause. It gives me pause because we can too easily get caught up in these same culture wars. As things change rapidly around us, we begin to forget where our hope is.

Instead of trusting in the sovereign God who makes nations rise and fall and who works for the flourishing of his people we instead believe that we must find worldly solutions to these issues.

So we put our hope and trust in fallen politicians and in man made laws, and at times align ourselves with groups or public figures that might actually be hostile to the things of Christ.

And yet, we somehow delude ourselves into believing that we are doing God's work, as if he needs our human hands, instead of realizing that we will be held accountable for our misplaced trust and our alignment with evil. As it says in 2 Corinthians 5:10:

[10] For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

So take hope and take warning. Whether outside or inside the church, like Edom, God will repay those who are evil.

3. God brings evil deeds to light (V. 11-14)

Obadiah 11-14

*[10] Because of the violence done to your brother Jacob,
shame shall cover you,
and you shall be cut off forever.*

*[11] On the day that you stood aloof,
on the day that strangers carried off his wealth
and foreigners entered his gates
and cast lots for Jerusalem,
you were like one of them.*

*[12] But do not gloat over the day of your brother
in the day of his misfortune;
do not rejoice over the people of Judah
in the day of their ruin;
do not boast
in the day of distress.*

*[13] Do not enter the gate of my people
in the day of their calamity;
do not gloat over his disaster
in the day of his calamity;
do not loot his wealth
in the day of his calamity.*

*[14] Do not stand at the crossroads
to cut off his fugitives;*

***do not hand over his survivors
in the day of distress.***

So now Edom's crimes come fully to light. In verse 10 we learn that they committed violence against Judah. But what kind of violence?

The first part of verse 11 tells us that they stood aloof as the Babylonians ransacked Jerusalem and the temple. They knew what was happening to Judah their kinsman and they did nothing.

And if that isn't bad enough verse 12 says that they gloated over Judah. They were so smug and happy about Judah falling that they were probably cheering the as the Babylonians carried God's people away into captivity.

Then in the face of Judah's shame and fallen status, the people of Edom were emboldened. According to verse 11 and 13 they went into Jerusalem and were looting the city.

And in verse 14 instead of helping them the Jews who were seeking refuge, they cut them off, captured them, and gave them over to the Babylonians to be exiled.

If you have been sitting here and waiting for Edom's rap sheet of crimes to be recounted here it is. They didn't help, they gloated and rejoiced over Judah's destruction, they looted Jerusalem, and they handed the refugees over to the evil king of Babylon.

And God in his justice has not forgotten their deeds and he will judge them accordingly.

Now, I know it can feel, at times, like God turns a blind eye to evil. We see evils prevailing all around us, and it can feel like God doesn't care. But our God never turns a blind eye to the plight of his children, and he never turns a blind eye to evil.

God sees all the children who are killed by abortion. He sees all of the egregious acts that are done to little kids in our country and world. He sees all of the acts of murder, violence, and sexual perversion.

He sees all the vehement hate and vitriol that may at times come against us and against the church. And he sees all that people are doing to try and limit the power of God and the ability of his people preach the gospel in our nation and world.

He sees all the dark crevices of everyone's heart, and all that is done in the open and in secret. Nothing escapes him. And not only does he see it, but he says that he will exposes it. As Jesus says in Luke 8:17:

[17] For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light.

And when he ultimately exposes evil, he also lets us know that he will do something about it, whether that happens is in our lifetime or in eternity to come. That is our next point this morning.

4. God will be victorious over his enemies, including Edom (V. 15-16)

Obadiah 15–16

[15] For the day of the LORD is near upon all the nations.

As you have done, it shall be done to you;

your deeds shall return on your own head.

[16] For as you have drunk on my holy mountain,

so all the nations shall drink continually;

they shall drink and swallow,

and shall be as though they had never been.

The word “For” that stands at the beginning of these two verses becomes the turning point where we turn from the recounting of Edom’s pride, their crimes, and the verdict of their guilt, to the reading of the punishment.

And it also connects the punishment with all that has come before it. Meaning, that because of their pride, gloating, rejoicing in destruction, looting, and capturing God’s people, the Day of the Lord is coming.

Now in scripture, the Day of the Lord can point to the eschatological future when Christ returns, or it can refer to a time in the near future when God brings judgement upon a people and vindicates his own character and kingdom purposes.

In the fuller section of verse 15-21 I believe we can see both of these ideas present, but in these two verses I believe the immediate application is to Edom and all the nations that have come against God’s people.

Meaning that all that the Edomites and the Babylonians have done to God’s people will be done to them. **Their evil deeds according to verse 15 will come back to bit them in the end.**

This language is them emphasized and expanded in the first half of verse 16 when it says:

[16a] For as you have drunk on my holy mountain,

so all the nations shall drink continually;

That might seem like a weird phrase to you, but it makes sense if we look at Jeremiah 25:17-21, and the last part of verse 26.

[17] So I took the cup from the LORD's hand, and made all the nations to whom the LORD sent me drink it: [18] Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, its kings and officials, to make them a desolation and a waste, a hissing and a curse, as at this day; [19] Pharaoh king of Egypt, his servants, his officials, all his people, [20] and all the mixed tribes among them; all the kings of the land of Uz and all the kings of the land of the Philistines (Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, and the remnant of Ashdod); [21] Edom, Moab, and the sons of Ammon;

[26] ...And after them the king of Babylon shall drink.

If we were to put this into gangster movie terms, “**everybody is getting wacked.**”

So the drinking that Edom and the nations are doing is the reality that they are drinking God's judgement upon themselves which will result in their destruction. As the last part of Obadiah 16 says:

*[16] ...they shall drink and swallow,
and shall be as though they had never been.*

God will bring destruction upon and gain victory over his enemies including Edom. God will not let evil go unpunished. He has never done that in the past and he will not do that in the future. As it says in the New Testament in Romans 1:18:

[18] For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

But this whole prophecy isn't just about God's judgement, wrath, and victory over his enemies. It is also about hope, which is our final point for this morning.

5. God gives hope to scattered exiles (V. 17-21)

Obadiah 17–21

*[17] But in Mount Zion there shall be those who escape,
and it shall be holy,
and the house of Jacob shall possess their own possessions.*

*[18] The house of Jacob shall be a fire,
and the house of Joseph a flame,
and the house of Esau stubble;
they shall burn them and consume them,
and there shall be no survivor for the house of Esau,
for the LORD has spoken.*

*[19] Those of the Negeb shall possess Mount Esau,
and those of the Shephelah shall possess the land of the Philistines;
they shall possess the land of Ephraim and the land of Samaria,
and Benjamin shall possess Gilead.*

*[20] The exiles of this host of the people of Israel
shall possess the land of the Canaanites as far as Zarephath,
and the exiles of Jerusalem who are in Sepharad
shall possess the cities of the Negeb.*

*[21] Saviors shall go up to Mount Zion
to rule Mount Esau,
and the kingdom shall be the LORD's.*

Here we have God's message of hope to his scattered exiles both in Obadiah's day and now. Yes, God scattered the people of Judah and sent them into exile in Babylon. Yes, they were destroyed, disgraced, and displaced. But God isn't done with them yet.

As it says in verse 17, the house of Jacob (God's people) will once again have their own possession, and 19-20 make it clear that they will once again possess the physical promise land.

And in God's goodness they saw a partial fulfillment of this when the exiles were able to return from captivity in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

God, despite their sin, and all the evil that was set against them, restored the scattered exiles to their land. And in so doing reminded them that he is their God, and they are his treasured possession and people.

But we know that there is still a greater fulfillment of this prophecy to come. A day that verse 21 is pointing to when it says: *[21] ...and the kingdom shall be the LORD's.*

A day when all the Jews and sojourners from eras past who put their hope in the coming Messiah, and all those, including us, who have now put their hope in Christ will inherit a heavenly and eternal kingdom.

A kingdom not build with human hands, human ingenuity, or human effort, but a kingdom inherited by faith in the one true God and Savior of the world, Jesus Christ.

For he is the God who will not only humble the proud, repay those who are evil, expose evil and darkness for what it truly is, and gain victory over his enemies and the enemies of his people. **But he is the God who tells us don't worry, don't be afraid, don't lose heart, but be ready, and put your full hope in me, because I am coming for you. As it says in this last verse from Hebrews 9:28:**

[28] so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.