

Obadiah

God's judgment against the proud

January 21, 2010

The book of Obadiah, if assessed merely by its length, is the "most minor" of the minor prophets. It is the shortest book in the Old Testament. By the way, in case you were wondering, 3 John is the shortest Book in the Bible. The Book of Obadiah is short, but it is packed with God's promises that were fulfilled after this Book was written and the prophecy that is going to be fulfilled at the end of the Great Tribulation.

But don't let its size fool you. Its twenty-one verses remind us in a powerful way that God faithfully stands by His redeemed people; that He will indeed deliver the eternal blessings as He has promised; and that the wicked who persecute God's people, though successful and secure for a time, will be brought to ruin by the Lord of heaven.

Obadiah is for anyone who needs a fresh reminder that, no matter whoever is against us, God is for us. And with us. Forever.

Romans 8:31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

A. THE AUTHOR AND THE TIMELINE

There are thirteen people in the OT whose names were Obadiah. But we cannot link any of the other twelve Obadiah's with the writer of this Book. He didn't even provide us his genealogy for us to guess. Consequently, we do not know the exact timeline when this Book was written. But many biblical scholars think that it was written around 848-840 B.C. during the period of king Jehoram in Judah.

By the way, his name means "one who worships God." What a great name!

B. THE THEME OF THE BOOK

The theme of the Book is the coming of God's judgment against Edom. This is the only Book in the OT which was entirely devoted to a nation other than Israel.

We can divide this Book into three sections:

v1-9 Edom's humiliation and destruction

v10-14 Edom's cruelty and crimes

v15-21 Edom and the Day of the Lord

C. EDOM AND ISRAEL – A HISTORY OF CONFLICT

Just who were the Edomites, anyway? The nation pops up all over the Old Testament. In fact, God's judgment against Edom is mentioned in more Old Testament Books than against any other foreign nation.

What did this nation, which bordered Judah to the east and south, do to arouse God's wrath? They were proud, arrogant and self-sufficient. But most of all, they looked down on and hated the chosen people of God – an animosity that went all the way back to a significant family feud in the Book of Genesis.

Esau and Jacob were twin brothers who had been competitors from before birth. Unfortunately, their parents didn't help any by Isaac being partial to Esau and Rebekah favoring Jacob. God had chosen Jacob, the younger son, to receive the blessing attached to the Abrahamic Covenant, but Jacob and Rebekah decided to get this blessing by scheming instead of by trusting God. When Esau learned that his sneaky brother had stolen the blessing, he planned to kill him after their father was dead.

If Jacob and Rebekah trusted the Lord, could He bring the birth right to Jacob without a con job? A thousand times "Yes". We are the ones who always complicate the matters even though the Lord has everything under control.

Years later, the two brothers experienced a brief time of reconciliation, and they both faithfully attended to the burial of Isaac, but the animosity was never removed. Esau established the nation of Edom, and his descendants carried on the family feud that Esau had begun years before.

This animosity flared up generations later, after Israel was freed from 430 years of Egyptian slavery. When Moses and the Israelites asked permission to pass through Edom on their journey to the Promised Land, the king of Edom said no and backed up his answer with a military barricade. They even attacked the sick, old and younger ones at the end of Israel's marching column to add more fuel to the fire between Israelites and Edomites.

D. THE JUDGMENT OF EDMOM

Obadiah 1-9 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, saying, "Arise, and let us rise up against her for battle"): 2 "Behold, I will make you small among the nations; You shall be greatly despised. 3 The pride of your heart has deceived you, You who dwell in the clefts of the rock, Whose habitation is high; You who say in your heart, 'Who will bring me down to the ground?' 4 Though you ascend as high as the eagle, And though you set your nest among the stars, From there I will bring you down," says the Lord. 5 "If thieves had come to you, If robbers by night-- Oh, how you will be cut off!-- Would they not have stolen till they had enough? If grape-gatherers had come to you, Would they not have left some gleanings? 6 "Oh, how Esau shall be searched out! How his hidden treasures shall be sought after! 7 All the men in your confederacy Shall force you to the border; The men at peace with you Shall deceive you and prevail against you. Those who eat your bread shall lay a trap for you. No one is aware of it. 8 "Will I not in that day," says the Lord, "Even destroy the wise men from Edom, And understanding from the mountains of Esau? 9 Then your mighty men, O Teman, shall be dismayed, To the end that everyone from the mountains of Esau May be cut off by slaughter.

In v3, the Scripture says that the Edomites dwelled in the clefts of the rock. They did. They lived in Petra, in current Jordan. Once it was considered as an impenetrable city due to a natural high elevation and extremely limited access.

Located on several major trade routes, Edom could store the riches of other nations. Because of their isolation, they didn't have to worry about submitting themselves to other nations or helping to finance expensive wars.

Though protected by their high elevation, the Edomites were smart enough to know that they needed friends to help them stand against the great empires that frequently threatened the smaller eastern nations. But God turned these friends into enemies, and those who had eaten bread with them and made covenants of peace would break those covenants. While pretending to be friends, their allies would turn into traitors, set a trap, and catch Edom by surprise. And they took away everything.

The people of Edom were known for their wisdom. Located as they were on the great trade routes, the leaders of Edom could get news and views from many nations. One of Job's so-called friends Eliphaz was from Ternan in Edom.

King Herod the Great, who tried to murder the baby Jesus, was a descendant of Edomites. In Jesus' protection from Herod's murderous rampage against Bethlehem's infants we have yet another illustration of God's grace toward Israel and judgment of Edom. After the family of Herod which was vanished after their deaths, there is no known Edomites in history. Another fulfillment of God's prophecy.

E. THE CHARGES AGAINST EDMOM

Obadiah 10-14 "For violence against your brother Jacob, Shame shall cover you, And you shall be cut off forever. 11 In the day that you stood on the other side-- In the day that strangers carried captive his forces, When foreigners entered his gates And cast lots for Jerusalem-- Even you were as one of them. 12 But you should not have gazed on the day of your brother In the day of his captivity; Nor should you have rejoiced over the children of Judah In the day of their destruction; Nor should you have spoken proudly In the day of distress. 13 You should not have entered the gate of My people In the day of their calamity. Indeed, you should not have gazed on their affliction In the day of their calamity, Nor laid hands on their substance In the day of their calamity. 14 You should not have stood at the crossroads To cut off those among them who escaped; Nor should you have delivered up those among them who remained In the day of distress.

Edomites were doing just fine if they kept their noses clean. But they chose to cover themselves with shame because of their pride over their brother Israel. Edom had stood by while enemies invaded Jerusalem and carried off her riches. The Edomites had even "cast lots," apparently to decide which portion of the ruined city to plunder. In this way, they were as guilty as the invaders.

If someone had asked Edomites, "Are you your brother's keeper?" they would have replied, "No! We're our brother's killer!"

To add insult to injury, the Edomites actually caught Jews who were escaping from Jerusalem, rounded them up and then delivered them back into the hands of their enemies. It was bad enough for people to do nothing to help their brothers, and to stand and rejoice at their brothers' calamities, but when they gave aid to the enemy, that was carrying their ancient "family feud" too far.

Are we guilty of the same – or worse – when we see others in distress or calamity? If so, God sees it as sin and He must deal with it in our life. When our fellow believers are going through calamities or just difficult times, how do we handle it? Do we watch how they suffer? Or do we come along their side to help them?

F. THE DAY OF THE LORD

Obadiah 15-21 "For the day of the Lord upon all the nations is near; As you have done, it shall be done to you; Your reprisal shall return upon your own head. 16 For as you drank on my holy mountain, So shall all the nations drink continually; Yes, they shall drink, and swallow, And they shall be as though they had never been. 17 "But on Mount Zion there shall be deliverance, And there shall be holiness; The house of Jacob shall possess their possessions. 18 The house of Jacob shall be a fire, And the house of Joseph a flame; But the house of Esau shall be stubble; They shall kindle them and devour them, And no survivor shall remain of the house of Esau," For the Lord has spoken. 19 The South shall possess the mountains of Esau, And the Lowland shall possess Philistia. They shall possess the fields of Ephraim And the fields of Samaria. Benjamin shall possess Gilead. 20 And the captives of this host of the children of Israel Shall possess the land of the Canaanites As far as Zarephath. The captives of Jerusalem who are in Sepharad Shall possess the cities of the South. 21 Then saviors shall come to Mount Zion To judge the mountains of Esau, And the kingdom shall be the Lord's.

Apparently, Edom had participated in a drunken celebration in Jerusalem when the city was overrun. They and the other nations would drink again – only next time the cup will be filled, not with wine, but with God's wrath.

Edom was too proud and didn't care about what the Lord might do to them like all the unbelievers now. "The Day of the Lord" is a phrase that describes the time when God will pour His wrath out upon a wicked world, judge the nations, and then establish His kingdom, thus fulfilling the promises made to Israel. However, the phrase was also used to describe God-ordained calamities sent to punish people at any time, and these judgments were foretastes of the future worldwide "Day of the Lord."

God will give simple justice to the Edomites, no more and no less. What they did to the people of Judah will also be done to them. The same principle is true for us, so if we want mercy from God, we do well to give mercy to others.

There is a sense in which God's judgment against Edom was just the fulfillment of His promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3:

Genesis 12:3 I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

The Edomites cursed Israel, so they were cursed. If we want to be blessed, we should bless the Jewish people.

Galatians 6:7 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.

God did deliver His people from Babylonian Captivity, and He will again deliver them in the last days and establish His kingdom. Mount Zion will be consecrated to the Lord and all defilement removed. "Jacob" refers to the Southern Kingdom and "Joseph" the Northern Kingdom. They will be united into one nation and enter the Messianic Kingdom together, possessing the inheritance promised to them.

All of God's children look forward to the day when the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdom of our Lord, and He shall reign forever and ever. Then every knee shall bow to Him and every tongue confess that He is Lord of all.

It's not just the enemies of God, however, who need to guard against becoming prideful. As we've seen in the other prophetic books, God didn't tolerate Israel's or Judah's self-exalting, God-neglecting lifestyle either.

We need to remember that God wants us to be secure in Him, not in ourselves or our accomplishments. He alone is our Fortress, our Rock, our Shield, our Provider. How can we be proud when we realize that every blessing we have – whether material, spiritual, or relational – comes from His hand?

James 1:17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

The Lord allowed us to have a land to build our church. I don't know where He is going to take our little church from here. But it really doesn't matter, because it is His church.

G. APPLICATIONS

1) As the believers of Jesus Christ, we constantly need to refocus from our own fortress to our Father; from our own strength to His; from taking credit ourselves to giving Him the credit; from accomplishment to adoration; from the riches we can accumulate to the riches which are provided for us in Christ.

2) It is for Christ, by Christ and of Christ.