

Week of April 28, 2013
Obadiah: A Message of God's Justice

Passage Outline:

1. A Nation's Attitude - Obadiah 1-4
2. A Nation's Failure to Act - Obadiah 10-15
3. A Nation's Hope - Obadiah 17-18,21

What This Lesson Is About:

This lesson is about God's response to arrogance and pride, especially at the expense of innocent victims, and how we should respond to unjust acts against them. This lesson will encourage you to humbly take an active part in helping others in times of need, especially when they have been victimized.

1. A Nation's Attitude - Obadiah 1-4

Obadiah 1:1-4

¹ The vision of Obadiah. This is what the Sovereign LORD says about Edom-- We have heard a message from the LORD: An envoy was sent to the nations to say, "Rise, and let us go against her for battle"-- ² "See, I will make you small among the nations; you will be utterly despised. ³ The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rocks and make your home on the heights, you who say to yourself, 'Who can bring me down to the ground?' ⁴ Though you soar like the eagle and make your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down," declares the LORD.

Prophecy in the Old Testament was intended to encourage faith by its message, as well as to give insights into the future. The prophecy may be fulfilled prior to our time, but the meaning for us is how we can come to know God through His dealing with His people in the past. Hence, the message of Obadiah is relevant for us as we learn not to repeat the sinful actions of Edom.

Secondly, the words "This is what the Sovereign LORD says about Edom" turns our attention immediately from the prophet/messenger to the divine Author. This prophecy is not Obadiah's; it is God's message. As believers, we realize that since Obadiah is God's Word, it also speaks to us and directly applies to our Christian walk. Therefore, what God said about Edom, we also need to ponder and take to heart.

Read the articles "Edom: Its Land and People" and "The Life Situation of Obadiah" contained in the Heavy Duty Preparation packet.

The message of Obadiah chastises the Edomites for their arrogant and indifferent attitude. The first part of the message (vv. 1b-2) describes God's judgment against Edom; the second (vv. 3-4) explains the reason for the judgment.

In the first part a messenger or envoy was sent among the nations with a message from the Lord. When war threatened, envoys were sent to call upon all the allies, treaty partners, and subject lands summoning soldiers and supplies for combat. Obadiah repeated the envoy's call to arms: "Rise up, and let us go to war against her." The purpose of the coalition was to humble Edom. God declared that He would make Edom insignificant among the nations. Edom will be deeply despised. God would make them small and of no significance. Just as Edom despised their brother Israel in time of need, so God would make them very despised among the nations. The word *despise* carries the idea of "little worth."

In the second part (vv. 3-4) God explained why Edom must be judged and punished. Edom possessed a presumptuous or proud heart. The Hebrew word translated *presumptuous* occurs only 11 times in the Old

Testament and carries the idea of being too self-assured. This kind of arrogant over-confidence led Edom to entertain the false hope that they were invincible in their mountainous realm with their lofty ridges running from the Zered River (SE of Dead Sea) in the north to the Gulf of Aqaba in the south. The mountains of the nation rose as high as 5,700 feet above sea level. Many Edomite cities nestled among the sharp crags, caves, and clefts peppering the mountains. The terrain provided a natural defense from enemy invasion. The Edomites trusted in this false confidence. They reassured themselves by saying, “Who can bring me down to the ground?”

The Edomites may have been safe from most enemies, but not from God. Although they lived in clefts of the rock and had homes on the heights, God would bring them down. Such a high and lofty refuge offered no match for God. Even if the Edomites could soar like an eagle or make their nest among the stars, they were not out of reach of sovereign God. God declared, even from there I will bring you down.

The self-confidence and pride of the Edomites led them astray. While “self-confidence” is a popular and much sought after human characteristic today, when it is combined with pride it can lead to sinful arrogance and presumption. It can mislead believers into thinking that the status quo in our personal lives and in our nation is acceptable to God. But this only dulls our spiritual discernment and removes God from the center of our lives. Believers should always place their confidence in God, who values all of life.

2. A Nation’s Failure to Act - Obadiah 10-15

Obadiah 1:10-15

¹⁰Because of the violence against your brother Jacob, you will be covered with shame; you will be destroyed forever. ¹¹On the day you stood aloof while strangers carried off his wealth and foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem, you were like one of them. ¹²You should not look down on your brother in the day of his misfortune, nor rejoice over the people of Judah in the day of their destruction, nor boast so much in the day of their trouble. ¹³You should not march through the gates of my people in the day of their disaster, nor look down on them in their calamity in the day of their disaster, nor seize their wealth in the day of their disaster. ¹⁴You should not wait at the crossroads to cut down their fugitives, nor hand over their survivors in the day of their trouble. ¹⁵"The day of the LORD is near for all nations. As you have done, it will be done to you; your deeds will return upon your own head.

Obadiah confronted Edom not only because of their violence against others, but also because of their indifference to the suffering of her brothers Jews. Edom was not moved to defend Jerusalem while she was under siege and then finally fell in 587-586 B.C. to the Babylonians.

For us, Obadiah’s message is clear. We must respond to the plight of innocent victims. This would include certainly our prayer and financial support, but may also include personal involvement. Indifference toward any issues where victims suffer, effectively lends support to its practice, and is unacceptable to God.

Edom was the descendent of Esau, brother of Jacob, who became Israel (Gen. 25:20-26). Conflict arose between the two brothers (25:27-34; 27:41). Although it apparently had been resolved (33:3-4), tension continued between the two nations (Num. 20:14-21; Amos 1:11-12). Edom had been a vassal of Judah off and on from the time of David (2 Sam. 8:11-14) until Uzziah, king of Judah (2 Chron. 26:1-2). But now the Edomites stood aloof as the Babylonians sacked Jerusalem.

On that terrible day when strangers (the Babylonians) captured Judah’s wealth and cast lots for Jerusalem, Edom stood aloof. *Stood aloof* can be interpreted two ways. Either the Edomites refused to come to the aid of Judah and did nothing, or they actually acted in opposition to Judah and participated in the looting and killing. Perhaps some did one or the other. In either case they demonstrated they were not on the side of Judah. Edom was just like the Babylonians, in that, “refusing to come to the aid of someone in need is the same as rendering the harm yourself” (as Jesus illustrates in the Parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:30-37).

Verses 12-14 contain a series of eight prohibitions, each beginning with a specific negative in Hebrew and translated “you should not have...” The first three prohibitions focus on Edom’s smug and presumptuous arrogance toward Judah in rejoicing over Judah’s destruction. Edom was **not** to gloat, **not** to rejoice, and **not** to mock Judah on her day of calamity, destruction, and distress.

The second set of three prohibitions concern Edom’s role in looting the wealth of Judah (v. 13). Again, God sternly rebuked Edom with the same negative particle Do not. Edom was **not** to enter Jerusalem’s gates, **not** to gloat over their misery, and certainly **not** take Judah’s possessions.

The last set of two prohibitions (v. 14) emphasize Edom’s sinister disregard for human life. Some of the Edomites were waiting at the crossroad to cut off the fugitives fleeing Jerusalem. An ambush is meant here, and the Edomites waited to kill the fugitives. Those they did not kill were handed over to the Babylonians or the slave traders as human slaves, another despicable kind of disregard for human life.

Since Edom did not come to Judah’s rescue on her “terrible day,” another more significant day is mentioned, namely “the great Day of the Lord.” This future day would find Edom regretting their actions on the day Jerusalem fell. Obadiah declared three things about the Day of the LORD. First, it was imminent. It is near. Second, it was universal in its scope. It would judge all the nations. Third, the punishment dispensed would be appropriate for the wrong.

Please read the article “The Day of the Lord” contained in the Heavy Duty Preparation Packet.

3. A Nation’s Hope - Obadiah 17-18, 21

Obadiah 1:17-21

¹⁷ But on Mount Zion will be deliverance; it will be holy, and the house of Jacob will possess its inheritance.

¹⁸ The house of Jacob will be a fire and the house of Joseph a flame; the house of Esau will be stubble, and they will set it on fire and consume it. There will be no survivors from the house of Esau." The LORD has spoken. ...²¹ Deliverers will go up on Mount Zion to govern the mountains of Esau. And the kingdom will be the LORD's.

How merciful of God, that even in a message of judgment He offers hope to those who repent and love Him. The end of the Book of Obadiah offers hope to Judah despite their judgment and captivity. Unfortunately, since Edom refused to repent, she will be completely destroyed.

Obadiah’s message to Judah offered hope because of a future deliver, who would be pure and holy, and come from the house of Jacob. We see this as a direct reference to the coming Savior Jesus Christ.

In verse 17, when Obadiah used the word *deliverance* he made a direct play on the word *fugitives* in verse 14. Both nouns come from the same Hebrew root “to escape.” Those attempting to “escape” the Babylonians but cut off by the Edomites would find real “escape” on Mount Zion! Mount Zion, which had been the scene of distress and death in the Babylonian invasion, would at a later time provide Judah’s deliverance. Jesus Christ would be sacrificed on Mount Zion for not only the deliverance of the Jews but that of the whole world.

In verse 18 Obadiah used the phrases *house of Jacob* and *house of Joseph* in parallel lines to refer to the restored and reunited Children of Israel. Obadiah seems to follow the equation Jacob = Judah (Southern Kingdom) and Joseph = Israel (Northern Kingdom). The hope of Obadiah is not only that God would bring back the exiled Israelites but also restore a united monarchy under His Messiah.

In verse 21, Obadiah set his eyes on the future and God’s sovereign and supreme reign over all nations and

peoples. Literally a Savior will ascend the restored and consecrated Mount Zion. He will judge or rule Mount Zion and over the mount of Esau. In the end the kingdom shall be the Lord's. Hallelujah!

Biblical Truths in Focus

1. We should always place our confidence in God, who values all of life.
2. We should find ways to meet people's needs. When we do, we demonstrate love.
3. National pride in the form of patriotism is appropriate, but arrogance on the part of a nation is an affront to God.
4. We should pray for national repentance, revival, and renewal.
5. We should trust God to bring about His kingdom and seek this kingdom by seeking God's righteousness.