

Obadiah – Sermon September 17, 2023

This morning, we move to the prophet Obadiah. It is beneficial to begin with some background information. Of the twelve minor prophets, Obadiah is the shortest book in the Old Testament, containing one chapter of 21 verses. Some might believe that because of its length, there is nothing essential for us to learn, but through the prophet, God has a significant message for every age and time. “The Pride of the heart is the source of all sins.” Here is what we know about the prophet. Nothing is known about him, where he was born, lived, or his parents. The Bible is silent about him and possibly an author using an anonymous pen name.

The Old Testament mentions the name Obadiah twelve times; however, none is to be identified with the prophet. There is uncertainty regarding when the book was written or much about the prophet. So, what do we know about Obadiah, and who knows what is in the book? First, his name is in Hebrew and pronounced “Ovhadyah.” His name means servant of Yahweh. The only thing scholars can figure out is Obadiah’s reference to the harsh and bitter times following the capture and destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians that brought the kingdom of Judah to an end in 587 BC. What we do know about Obadiah’s prophecy is directed entirely to the Edomites, the distant cousins of the Israelites and direct descendants of Esau. But before we dig into Obadiah, let us pause to pray.

Father, we thank you for this time together as we look into the text that you would bring to light its modern application, and together, we will be stretched, challenged, and changed. We ask your Word to minister to our hearts. Speak to us, we pray, in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Let’s open our Bibles, turning to the book of Obadiah, and follow along as I read verses one through four. Turn to page 653 in your pew bible and page 1433 in the large print.

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, 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 an eagle and make your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down,” declares the LORD.

There was this big-city California lawyer who went duck hunting in rural Texas. He shot and dropped a duck, but it fell into a farmer's field on the other side of a fence from where the lawyer shot.

As the lawyer started to climb over the fence, an elderly farmer drove up on his tractor and asked him just what the heck he thought he was doing.

The lawyer responded, "I shot a duck, and it fell into this field, and now I'm going to retrieve it."

The old farmer replied, "You just hold on a dadburn minute. This is my property, and that's no way you're coming over that thar fence."

The indignant lawyer said, "I am one of the best trial attorneys in the U.S., and if you don't let me get that duck, I'll sue you and take everything you own!"

The old farmer smiled and said, "Apparently, you don't know how we do things in Texas. We settle small disagreements like this with the 'Texas Three-Kick' rule."

The lawyer asked, "What is the 'Texas Three-Kick Rule'?"

The farmer replied, "Well, first I kick you three times, and then you kick me three times, and so on, back and forth, 'till someone gives."

The attorney quickly thought about the proposed contest and decided he could easily take the old codger. He agreed to abide by the local custom.

The old farmer slowly climbed off the tractor and strode up to the city feller. His first kick planted the toe of his heavy work boot into the lawyer's shins, causing him to hop on one foot. His second kick knocked the man right off his feet. With the lawyer flat on his back, the farmer's third kick caused him to see stars.

The lawyer summoned every bit of his will, managed to get to his feet, and said, "Okay, you old coot! Now it's my turn!"

The old farmer smiled and said, "No way, mister, I give up. You can have the duck!"¹

That's what is happening here in the book of Obadiah. We know from history the Edomites have been kicking the Israelites while they are down. Edom's cliffs rose in three great steps to five thousand feet, and its landscape of mountains, cliffs, rocky defiles, and stony plateaus defied any invader. Remember, in history, Hitler had the same idea in his military command post 6000 ft high in the mountains called the Eagle's Nest. Anyhow. Thus, Edom boasted in verse 3, "Who will bring me down to the ground." Only God knows what is happening and sends Obadiah to speak, focusing on three issues. Edom's prideful arrogance, their coming humiliation, and their violence against Judah. A little reminder of the historical context. Who are the Edomites? Well, they are not related to "The Mosquito bites." The Edomites were the descendants of Esau, who, if you remember, was the twin brother of Jacob, the sons of Isaac and Rebekah that we read about in the opening Scripture taken from Genesis 25.

¹ Retrieved from <https://www.math.ttu.edu/~pearce/jokes1/joke-139>

If you remember, Jacob and Esau were twin brothers on opposite sides. Esau was born first, a red, hairy, rugged baby, and on his heel, his twin brother Jacob, who grew up as a homebody, a momma's boy, smooth and clean-shaven, and would probably listen to the likes of Barry Manilow. Think about Esau like this in today's sense. He is a man of the fields. He grows into a hunter, wears flannel shirts, chews tobacco, and likes guns and pick-up trucks while listening to Waylon and Willie. But the Bible tells us that Esau, coming home from the fields, is hungry and famished and despises his brother Jacob after selling his inheritance and birthright for some bread and lentil stew. Throughout the Scriptures, the many different relationships between human beings concern not just the persons involved but God. The basic laws given to the people of God in both the Old and New Testaments set forth God's concern with relations to parents, spouses, and neighbors. Marriage is guarded, as are relationships with friends, strangers, and even enemies throughout the teachings of Jesus.

Thus, in Obadiah, Edom is to be judged for betraying its brotherly relation with Judah. To tie things together, Judah was the offspring of Jacob and Edom of Esau. The law of Deuteronomy 23:7 forbids Israel from hating an Edomite because "he is your brother." But when Jerusalem was captured, Edom detested Judah and contributed to Judah's devastation and enslavement. Edom, therefore, was itself to be destroyed in the Day of the Lord when God would bring his final judgment upon all nations. I repeat, "All Nations."

God takes human relationships seriously between husband and wife, brother and sister, friends and neighbors, classes and races, societies, and nations. There is no reckless escape into some spiritual realm in the biblical faith, no other-worldly indifference to daily life. What we do in our contact with others is marked and measured by our Lord, and we are responsible for justice, mercy, and love toward those whom God has brought into our lives. But here is the kicker. Obadiah shares a concept of God's judgment on sinful behavior with other scriptural passages that link the evil deed with its punishment. That is, what the sinner does is allowed to return upon their own head. However, scripture does not consider that such judgment is automatic and that we naturally suffer the consequences of what we or others have done in some cause-effect relationship.

The Edomites, in effect, held to a pagan culture, and the outstanding thought of Obadiah's book is God's moral judgment of nations through history. The morality of Edom's punishment is its cruel treatment of Israel, the related nation. Here is where it gets real, and I don't think I would be out of alignment when I say, "All nations will be judged in the day of the Lord," the final moral reckoning. But here is where I see things. Pagan nations are made up of spiritually defective people going down the slippery slope. After all, Obadiah is speaking about "Pride that leads to all other sins." PRIDE! This is the root of our problem as so-called professing Christians. Brothers and Sisters, do not be too curious about the sins of others because, in some sense, it makes us appear better in our boasting.

If you have your Bible open, look at verse 12. "You should not look down on your brother in the day of misfortune, nor rejoice over the people of Judah in the day of their destruction, NOR BOAST so much in the day of their trouble." This verse grows from the sin of a prideful heart because we consider ourselves better.

However, I want to clarify that as Christians, we are to examine the fruit of the vine if we are not growing in God. Obadiah has nothing left to speak of that coming day of the Lord that will be judgment for Edom and the character of people that flowed on in history. There is a

spiritual application for us in Obadiah. There was a day in history when two kings confronted one another for the first time. His name was King Herod Antiqua, who was an Edomite. His father, Herod the Great, had slaughtered the babes of Bethlehem in his desire to exterminate Christ. His son, the successor, was no better. He beheaded John the Baptist. In Luke 13:32, Jesus called him “that fox.” King Herod had everything he could ever want. If anyone stood in his way, even the lives of the innocent babes of Bethlehem, the lives of those babies meant little to him. The other king was Jesus.

Jesus was the King of Kings, one who, according to the flesh, was the natural heir to David’s throne and who, according to his divine nature, was the supreme King over all the kings of the earth. But Jesus did not look like a king as he stood in humble clothing. Jesus was rejected and, within hours, was to die a felon’s death. Jesus could have vindicated himself by sweeping away Herod from the throne, but instead, he chose not to take the throne until you and I could share it with him. To make that possible, he would die on the cross.

Brothers and sisters, the time is coming when God will sort things out and punish unrighteousness. The Day of the Lord will come to take the ungodly when often they seem to flourish. But God says that the ungodly will not go unpunished in the ultimate working of his plan. Verse 18 of Obadiah says, “**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.**” God promises that The Day of the Lord will come upon them, while those who are his people will be lifted up and blessed in Jesus Christ. God is delaying the ultimate working out of his judgment on many nations until those he calls to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ come. This is the day of grace. The apostle Peter says, “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). The Word of the Lord, thanks be to God. Amen.