

ABIDE

DISCOVERING YOUR OLD TESTAMENT



THE JUDGMENT OF ANOTHER

OBADIAH

Obadiah is an interesting little book, and when we say ‘little’ that is exactly what we mean. It is a tiny book. With only 21 verses total, Obadiah is one of the shortest books in the Bible. However, the history surrounding this prophecy is very large by comparison. Without understanding this, you are likely to breeze through this book in your reading and feel incredibly accomplished because you have read an entire book of the Bible with relative ease instead of plumbing the depths of Obadiah’s message.

The man Obadiah is hard to trace other than the information contained in this prophecy. There are thirteen other individuals in Scripture who we find that have the name of Obadiah, but none of these other men seem to be this man. If this is the case, this prophetic book is all the information that exists in discovering information about him. From the looks of things, scholars believe that he was probably a contemporary of Elijah and Elisha and was most likely a prophet to the southern kingdom.

His name means “Servant of the LORD” and in this particular book, the way this service was accomplished was by speaking out against the people of Edom. This nation is spoken against many times throughout the readings of the prophets, however, Obadiah’s prophecy is the most direct and the most confrontational out of them all.

Obadiah was one of those men who were able to see the city of Jerusalem completely intact and watched as Jerusalem was completely destroyed by the Babylonian Empire in 586 B.C. And while all of this destruction was occurring, there were the Edomites— sitting on the Southeast border of Israel and just watching as God’s people were being run down, tortured, and killed by the terrible opposing force of the Babylonians. Standing by and watching seems morbid, and we can further be absolutely horrified that these people were cheering and clapping as this destructive war was taking place.

This is actually the setting for Psalm 137. While God’s people were in captivity in Babylon, this was the account of their sorrow and their desire for justice to be done. But in the Psalm, not only the Babylonians were mentioned, but in verse 7 we see, “Remember, O LORD, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; who said, Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof.”

God’s people had not forgotten the fact that in their time of desperation, the Edomite nation was calling for the complete destruction of Jerusalem while Israel was experiencing one of the most desperate times in their nation’s history.

And if you’re beginning to wonder why exactly the Edomites were so happy that God’s people would be destroyed, then we

have to go all the way back to the story of the Patriarch, Isaac, and the birth of his twin boys, Esau and Jacob. Why here? Well because the tension from birth, into adulthood carried over to each of their successive generations. As God began to work in this life of Jacob, changing his name to Israel, and began creating a nation from his offspring, Esau began a family of his own which eventually became a nation. In a continued reading of the Genesis account, after Esau and Jacob reconciled, you find in chapter 36:1, these words, “Now these are the generations of Esau, who is Edom.” But as we make our way through the Pentateuch, we see that even though Esau and Jacob reconciled, those born to them did not, leading to an inevitable national rivalry. In fact, we see a major confrontation that occurs between these two nations once Israel is brought out of the land of Egypt. While Israel is in their forty years of wilderness journeyings, Moses sends word to the king of Edom asking if they could merely pass through a portion of their land, and in **Numbers 20:14**, we read these words, “And Moses sent messengers from Kadesh unto the king of Edom, Thus saith thy brother Israel, Thou knows all the travail that hath befallen us;” The passage continues with Moses making the request to move through these lands, but in verse 18, we see the response, “And Edom said unto him, Thou shalt not pass by me, lest I come out against thee with the sword.”

This hostility obviously carried over several hundred years later to the Babylonian invitation. Furthermore, this hostility is carried on even to this day by way of the surrounding countries of Israel.

Therefore, Obadiah is a book of judgment— but a judgment of another; not against Israel this time, but Edom.

How to Think About Obadiah

Because this prophecy is so small, it is fairly easy to see the outline divisions in Obadiah’s message. The whole of this prophecy can be summed up in two sections: 1) A Prophecy toward Edom and 2) A Prophecy toward Israel

A Prophecy Toward Edom (verses 1-16): The vision given to Obadiah had some very sobering things to say. It was a message of defeat for this kingdom.

You Cling to a False Security (vs. 3-9)— The kingdom of Edom was boastful and prideful because they felt emboldened by their location. They lived in the rocks and the caves and felt as though no enemy could take their kingdom because it was difficult terrain and naturally fortified. But God makes it clear that neither their location nor their mighty men would be able to deliver them from the judgment that will come against them.

You Caused Part of the Problem (verses 10-13)— In these verses, God specifically cites the wrongdoing that they engaged in while Israel was suffering. While the people of Israel were being led away into captivity, these people came in afterward and started pillaging Jerusalem. In a very literal way, they added to the grief of their own relatives and were happy to do it.

You Aided the Enemy (verse 14)— “Neither shouldest thou have stood in the crossway, to cut off those of his that did escape; neither shouldest thou have delivered up those of his that did remain in the day of distress.” While families were attempting to run and protect themselves from the threat of invasion, the Edomites made it their mission to make sure that this did not happen. They went on little ‘bounty hunting missions’ in order to help the Babylonians capture as many people as they could.

You Will be Destroyed (verses 15-16)— God tells these people that they will be repaid for their cruelty and that their kingdom would be so devastated that it would be like they had never existed.

A Prophecy Toward Israel (verses 17-21): Eventually, just like Israel, Edom would be judged. However, unlike Edom, Israel still had a future. Here God gives a great prophecy of the eventual restoration of Israel and establishes their inheritance forever.

What to Look for in Obadiah

Themes— What will cause this small prophecy to leave you with a large impression is by looking that the themes that can be found in its verses.

Pride: Pride seems to be the cause of the Edomites' action against Israel. Yes, there was resentment, but pride was the sin that became the result of the outward actions that caused them to act. They had no problem moving outside their city to occupy Israel and aid the Babylonians because not only did they feel superior, but they felt protected in that showing their presence could never be retaliated against because of their location in the mountains.

Justice: God demands that these sins caused by sin to be paid for by war. There would be no place to run, and no place to hide, and their name would be forever lost just as they desired for their kin nation of Israel.

Restoration: As all of the prophets, Obadiah points to a future time of restoration for His people. We should never become weary of God's repetition of the promise of redemption, but completely encouraged by it. God does not do anything by accident or oversight, and the fact that this theme happens so often should always cause us to stop and reflect for a moment on God's promises.

What to Gain from Obadiah

God Teaches that He Repays Evil for Evil— In verse 15, we read these words, "For the day of the LORD is near upon all the heathen: as thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee: thy reward shall return upon thine own head." There are so many people that live in a constant state of danger and never realize it. Just like these people, they look at their life and their faux superiority as a license to do whatever it is that they want. They feel that they are only accountable to themselves and they are quite satisfied with performing all kinds of evil— even at the expense of others. But God never lets their evil escape from their ledger. This is a sowing and reaping principle that you can never outrun.

God Teaches that We Should Never Become Indifferent Toward the Suffering of Others— Because of pride and hostility, the Edomites could look at Israel with cold and unresponsive eyes. They could see images, and be unmoved. They could hear screams, and smile. They could see abandoned property, and exploit it. They could witness escape and hinder movement. They were wholly indifferent to the suffering of others. That said, it is easy for us to become the same way. Perhaps in a different way, but the fact is the overstimulation of streaming violence occurring all over the world, and unnecessary stigma of certain people groups can be a real danger in looking at others with eyes of indifference. Truly, there are other causes for this, and truly this example is painted with a very large brush, however, the temptation exists to develop an indifferent attitude toward people in their hurt, and this is completely contrary to how God feels about the world.

God Teaches the Principle of Blessing and Cursing Israel— All the back in Genesis 12, you find this promise from God to Abraham in verses 2-3, "And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." God has never forgotten that promise, and God has never ignored that promise. It stands to this day and will continue to until He establishes His kingdom forever. This is why we need to stand with Israel. We don't have to agree with everything they do, but we should stand with them.



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