

THE PASTOR'S STUDY

Exercising The Mind || Igniting The Heart || Preparing The Hands
A free quarterly paper for rural pastors.

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Anglican Church in rural Uganda, Katikamu. Photo by Aaron Dunlop

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WELCOME TO THE PASTOR'S STUDY

Welcome to this issue of *The Pastor's Study*. This magazine is designed to help pastors in the study of the Word and in subjects that are helpful for a broad, instructive and effective teaching ministry. We begin with the editorial on The Sovereignty of God (page 3).

The theme of this issue is the book of Obadiah, the smallest Old Testament book, with only 21 verses. The commentary on this text is found on pages 6–8, the Preacher's Workshop in the centre pages (pages 10–11), and a helpful outline of the book on page 9.

We have included a number of writers for the first time: Dr. R.C. Sproul on Christ's compassion for the lost, kindly granted by Ligonier Ministries (pages 16– 17); Rev. Bart Elshout, In wrath remember mercy (pages 19–20); and also, Dr. Davy Elison, on The Nature of OT Prophecy (pages 4–5). Bible

commentator, Dr. Daniel C. Timmer gives us a very helpful overview of the message of Obadiah for today (page 14).

A regular Kenyan writer, pastor Tonny Karwa, includes an article on pastoral care for disagreeing members (pages 12–13). Dr. Joel Beeke gives us the final part of *The Pastor and the World* (page 15), and Dr. Michael Haykin submits an article dealing with Augustine on the Bible (page 18).

May this Lord bless this issue to his own glory.

Sincerely, Aaron Dunlop

EDITORIAL: FOUR STEPS IN EFFECTIVE PREACHING

Pastor Aaron Dunlop

The Bible teaches us that God is sovereign in his reign and controls all things (Psalm 135:6; Isaiah 46:9–11; Daniel 4:35). Every atom of creation is within the spheres of God's knowledge, power and presence.

But what about the world of human relationships and the world of principalities, powers, rulers of darkness and spiritual wickedness in high places (Ephesians 6:12). The tension between this world and God's sovereignty is sometimes more difficult to process.

God's sovereignty over the frustrations, difficulties and calamities that we face in this world comes up often in Scripture. We see it in the story of Job; over human depravity (Job 1:15, 17), and natural disasters (Job 1:16, 19).

The Preacher in Ecclesiastes tells us what God “has made crooked” we cannot make straight (Ecclesiastes 7:13).

Paul also tells us that God has subjected the world in which we live to vanity (Romans 8:20). These scriptures, and others like them, echo the text of Genesis 3 where God outlined how suffering would manifest itself in the life of humanity; specifically identifying the physiology of the woman, the work-life of the man and in the relationships of both (Genesis 3:16– 19).

Think of it this way; when Adam sinned in the garden the manner in which he fell and the form of the misery in which he landed was according to God’s sovereign purposes. In short, God has built pain, difficulty and frustration into the fabric of our world and all creation and humanity groans under it (Romans 8:22–23).

Only the power of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ can bring sense to this suffering and frustration.

It is the gospel alone, that provides the perspective of wisdom and knowledge to navigate the rough terrain of a fallen world, and in a strange and often inexplicable way, provides incomprehensible peace and inexpressible joy in the midst of it all (Ecclesiastes 2:26; Philippians 4:7; 1 Peter 1:8). In his sovereignty, God redeems the calamities, frustrations and pains of the world for his own glory and for our good (Romans 8:28).

THE NATURE OF OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY: UNDERSTANDING AND APPLYING THE PROPHETS

Dr. S.D. Ellison

Jesus recognised the three-fold division of the Old Testament: the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings (Luke 24:44). While each section has its own interpretive challenges, the prophetic books offer particular challenges due to their style. This article will present three principles to help us understand and apply the prophets today. It will employ Obadiah as an example.

There are three so-called Major Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel) which are long. There are 12 so-called Minor Prophets (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi) which are much shorter.

Consider the Old Testament

The first step is to carefully consider the Old Testament. The more we know about the Old Testament the better our understanding and application of the prophets. What was role of the Prophets in the Old Testament period? The prophets repeatedly point to God's saving work and covenant keeping. They have been called Covenant Enforcers; holding the people accountable to their covenant with God. Here in Obadiah, the enforcement of the covenant is positive, God will keep his promises (vss. 16, 19–21). Its enforcement can, however, be negative when the people have not kept the Covenant (Haggai 1:2–4).

Another reason to carefully consider the Old Testament is to learn the historical context in which the prophecy is delivered. Obadiah, for example, challenges a nation named Edom. This nation is descended from Esau, Jacob's twin brother (Genesis 25). These twin brothers, and the nations that descended

from them, should have been charitable to each other but they are not (Numbers 20:14–21; Obadiah 10–14). The events that lie behind Obadiah are just the latest in a long history of hostility.

Consider the Message

The second step is careful consideration of the prophet's message. It can be tempting to focus on the prophet, but what he says is more important than who he is. The message is more significant than the man. Obadiah is a perfect example of this—his prophecy offers no biographical details.

Even though Obadiah is obscure, his message is not. There is a clear announcement of God's wrath against those who do evil. Edom is warned against their pride (vs. 3), promised punishment (vss. 6–7), and God's people are assured a glorious future beyond present hardship (vss. 19–21). This message is the significant element of the book of Obadiah.

God will punish those against him and reward his own.

We need to focus on the message of the prophet—and it is usually either salvation or judgement—not the man behind the message. This will tell us whether the prophet is challenging us or comforting us.

Consider the New Testament

The third step is careful consideration of the New Testament. Resolution to problems in the prophets are found in the gospel. We must always press on towards the New Testament. The New Testament often picks up elements of the prophets' message. A couple of examples from Obadiah help illustrate the point.

First, note that King Herod is an Idumean, that is a descendant of Edom. It is this Herod who seeks to kill Jesus (Matthew 2:1–12), a descendent of Jacob. The struggle between these two brother nations persists.

Second, note the theme of enemies. Edom is Jacob's enemy, and because of that God is Edom's enemy. Once, we too were enemies of God and yet he reconciled us by the death of his son (Romans 5:10). We escape to Mount Zion because on the cross Jesus drank the cup of wrath reserved for us (Obadiah vss. 16–17).

Conclusion

Knowing our Old Testament's well will help us more quickly see what lies behind each prophetic book. This in turn should help us grasp the message of the prophet instead of being side-tracked into the person of the prophet. Finally, bringing the New Testament to bear on our reading of the prophet can infuse our application with gospel hope.

COMMENTARY: OBADIAH

The prophecy of Obadiah is the shortest of the Minor Prophets. It has only twenty-one verses. The roots of this book are found in the birth of the twins Jacob and Esau (Genesis 25:19–34; 27:38–41). The relationship between these two was bitter from the womb, where they were said to be “crushing each other” (Genesis 25:22).

Major division came when Esau sold his birthright and forfeited the patriarchal blessing and Jacob deceived his father, setting in motion a plan of premeditated murder. The Lord however, had his eye on Jacob (Romans 9:13, although he was a “supplanter”) and changed his name to Israel, (meaning: “God prevails”), while Esau was left to his own wayward campaign of murder. Esau’s name was changed at this time also to Edom (meaning: “red”) which points to his rejection

of God's provision for selling his birthright for red stew (Genesis 15:30; Genesis 27:39–40).

The Edomites moved from Canaan to Mount Seir on the east of the river Jordan. The Lord had given them a possession, promised them protection and the Israelites were not to meddle with them (Deuteronomy 2:2–6). There was always hostility between them however (2 Samuel 8:13–14; 1 Kings 11:15–16; 2 Kings 14:7; 2 Chronicles 25:11–12), and in 586 BC, when the Babylonians plundered Jerusalem and took the people captive to Babylon, the Edomites found an opportunity against Judah (see Psalm 137:7; Lamentation 4:21–22; Ezekiel 25:12–14, 35:1–15; Amos 1:11–12; Isaiah 21:11–12; Jeremiah 49:7–22).

Judgement Prepared in the Ungodly (vss. 2–9)

This is the context of the present prophecy and for this violence against Judah God judged Edom, not only because of what they did (vss.

10–14), but because of what they were as a people (vs. 2–9). Like the Edomites, we sin in thought word and deed, because we are sinners by nature. The first oracle against Edom then, focuses on the pride of the nation (vss. 2–4). They had become so puffed up with their own powers and the security of their geographical situation (which was God-given, Deuteronomy 2:5) that they thought themselves to be untouchable—“who will bring me down...” (vs. 3) assumes the answer “no one” can, not even God!

The pride of Edom had made the nation complacent and resting in their own security (vs. 6). But God is going to “pillage” the nation (vs. 6), to dig into the things of Edom— not only the nation collectively (plural), but every individual in the nation—“his (singular) things sought out.” Edom had joined forces with other enemies and become confederate with the other nations; any enemy of Israel was an ally of Edom (vs. 7). Cunning was another

characteristic of ungodly Edom—worldly wisdom had deceived them, but it would be no defence against God’s judgement (vs. 8). They had become selfconfident (vs. 9). Teman (named after Esau’s grandson, Genesis 36:11) was a part of the country known for the mighty men, men of courage, but even they will be dismayed when God comes down, for he is above all nations (Psalm 59:5,8).

Judgement Provoked by the Ungodly (vss. 10–14)

Edom provoked the judgement of God because of their “violence” against Judah (vs. 10). This is a strong word. It refers to a coldblooded and merciless violation of personal rights motivated by deep hatred. For this God said he would “cover them in shame” and “cut them off for ever” (vs. 10). They had acted just like the Babylonians, but in this case it was aggravated because it was against “your brother” (vs. 10). The number seven in Scripture indicates completion or perfection,

and Obadiah shows, by a list of seven actions that the violence of the Edomites was no half measure— gloat (twice), rejoice, boast, enter, loot, stand and hand over (vss. 12- 14).

The Edomite had perfected their malice against Judah, summarised in mockery (vs. 12, “... rejoice over the people of Judah”), marauding of God’s Property (vs. 13, “do not loot his wealth”) and murder of God’s people, and handing the survivors over to the enemy (vs.14, “do not ... cut off his fugitives”).

Judgment Prescribed for the Ungodly (vss. 15–16)

Obadiah outlines the Judgement that God has prescribed against this wicked malice. First, the prophet introduces “the day of the Lord” (vs. 15), both in the destruction of Edom, but also against “all the nations.” Edom represents all the heathen nations; they became the personification of godless malignity and pride. The fate of heathenism

then is bound up in the fate of Edom. And so while the message of Obadiah was written in a very particular sense towards Edom, it applies to the heathen nations in general, and the day of the Lord telescopes from the destruction of Edom to the final “day of the Lord.”

Second, judgement was decreed in proportion to their actions (vs. 15, “as you have done...”). This is the principle on which God works, referred to in the New Testament as “an eye for an eye” (Matthew 5:38) or “Whatsoever a man sows; that shall he also reap” (Galatians 6:7). The same principle was used with the Israelites, for God is no respecter of persons. Israel had “sold the righteous for silver and the poor for a pair of shoes,” and Israel would in turn be sold into captivity; like for like (Amos 2:6; 3:11f.).

Notice how the prophet lays this principle out in the book; the treachery of Edom against Judah (vs. 11,12), would be punished by the

treachery of their confederates (vs. 7). The Edomites had robbed Judah (vs. 13), so they would be robbed (vs. 5,6). They were violent against Judah (vs. 11), so they would suffer the violence of the sword (vs. 9). They sought Judah's destruction (vs. 12–14), so they would be utterly destroyed (vs. 10), and they sought to dispossess Judah (vs. 14), so they would be dispossessed (vs. 19).

Third, notice how Obadiah described this Judgment (vs. 16, "... shall drink"). Edom drank in Jerusalem in defiance against Israel and Israel's God, now Edom and all the heathen were going to drink again, this time of the cup of the wrath of God. The figure of drinking from the cup of wrath is used throughout the Scriptures (see Psalm 75:8; Revelation 18:3). The ungodly will stagger like a drunk man, under the wrath of God and they will "drink continually" (vs. 16; Isaiah 51:17), but Jesus has drunk the cup of wrath for those who trust him (John 18:11).

Deliverance promised to God's people (vss. 17–21)

The prophet connects the judgement against sin with the salvation of God's people. Judgement for sin and salvation from sin come together, as the image of Jesus on the cross shows us—the wrath of God against sin, but the mercy of God for all who trust him (See Psalm 85:10). In the end, the wicked will be dispossessed and God's people will possess all that Jesus has purchased for them. He reminds them, the kingdom is not David's or any earthly king, nor limited to the ethnic seed of Abraham, but “the kingdom shall be the Lord's” (vs. 21), a kingdom that cannot be shaken (Hebrews 11:10; 12:28).

HOMILETICAL OUTLINE OF OBADIAH

The prophecy of Obadiah has a very clear message for the world living in the 21st century, regarding the judgement of God, and the nature of God's judgement against sin. God's judgement against sin is not casual or an in-the-moment act of emotional rage. He judges sinners because of who they are in their conceit, complacency, etc. (point 3), and for how they act; i.e. in malice, mockery, etc. (point 4).

As in the book of Obadiah, the judgment of God comes at an appointed day and will be demonstrated openly and absolutely (point 5). But Obadiah also teaches us that in the midst of Judgement, God remembers mercy and will deliver his people (point 6).

Read this outline in connection with the commentary (pages 6–8) for a full explanation.

1. Title (vs. 1a “The Vision of Obadiah ... concerning Edom”)

2. Judgement Predicted on the Ungodly (vs. 1b “we have heard a report”)

3. Judgement Prepared in the Ungodly (vss. 2–9)

a. The Conceit of the Ungodly (vss. 2–4, “the pride of your heart”)

b. The Complacency of the Ungodly (vss. 5–6, “How Esau has been pillaged”)

c. The Confederacy of the Ungodly (vs. 7, “all your allies”)

d. The Cunning of the Ungodly (vs. 8, “... destroy the wise men...”)

e. The Confidence of the Ungodly (vs. 9 “mighty men shall be dismayed”)

4. Judgement Provoked by the Ungodly (vss. 10–14)

a. Malice towards God’s People (vs. 11, “you were like one of them”)

b. Mockery of God’s People (vs. 12,

“... rejoice over the people of Judah”)

c. Marauding of God's Property (vs. 13, “do not loot his wealth”)

d. Murder of God's People (vs.14, “do not ... cut off his fugitives”)

5. Judgement Prescribed for the Ungodly (vss. 15–6)

a. The Day of Judgement (vs. 15, “day of the Lord”)

b. The Decree of Judgement (vs. 15, “as you have done...”)

c. The Description of Judgement (vs. 16, “ ... shall drink”)

6. Deliverance Promised to God's People (vss. 17–21)

a. Promise of Consecration (vs. 17, “it shall be holy”)

b. Promise of Conquering (vss. 18–20, “shall possess”)

c Promise that is Conclusive (vs. 21, “the Kingdom shall be the Lord's”)

PASTORAL CARE FOR DISAGREEING MEMBERS: PART 1

Pastor Tonny Karwa

“I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.” (Philippians 4:2-3 ESV).

As a pastor or elder in a local church, disagreements between members will no doubt arise; marital struggles will come to your attention, or differences between two leaders, or personal matters between two members will come to your attention.

The most important question is, “How should you respond as a shepherd?” We will deal with it in two parts; be involved in this issue

and be impartial, in the next issue (July–September 2025)

Be Involved.

As a pastor of a local church, be involved in the dispute among your flock in at least two ways.

First, be involved personally. In his letter to the church in Philippi, Paul addresses a personal conflict between two sisters, Euodia and Syntyche. We do not know the nature of this conflict and we do not need to speculate. We must remember, however, that such personal conflicts, when not handled properly, have the potential of causing discouragement and/or division in the church. When such matters come to your attention as a pastor of a local church, imitate Paul by intervening (see vs. 9). Do not turn a blind eye to it.

Pastoral work includes, among other duties, conflict resolution. A pastor always seeks for

unity and harmony among his flock. He desires to see the sheep coexist peacefully. He is concerned about both corporate and personal disagreements.

Paul directly addresses the disagreeing parties—Euodia and Syntyche. He singles them out in the letter and mentions them by name. His intention is not to embarrass them, but he is holding the church in Philippi accountable for the dispute between the two ladies in their midst. He is, and we must also, involve other spiritually sound and mature brethren in the congregation including our elders. We must tap on the wealth of their experience and wisdom in handling these matters.

Be involved pastorally

Disputes are generally judicial in nature. That is, as a mediator, you are to act as a ‘judge’ in some way. However, where believers are involved, be more pastoral than judicial. Do

not be too interested in establishing who is right and who is wrong. Be more interested in their spiritual growth. In this Epistle, such spiritual growth is achieved by having the mind of Christ Jesus—the mind of humility (Philippians 2:1–8).

Humility as demonstrated by Christ Jesus, does not insist on its own rights. Rather, it counts others more significant than yourself and, therefore, being ready and willing to become their “servant” (vs. 3).

How does Paul approach the apparent disagreement?

First, he pleads with Euodia and Syntyche. Elsewhere he invokes his apostolic authority when addressing church matters (see 1 Corinthians 16:1). But in this case, he “entreats” the two ladies. This is the language of “begging,” out of much humility, pleading with them. This is a pastoral tone. His concern is to see them “agree.”

Paul understands that disagreements, especially when prolonged, usually leave the believers wounded. The members of the congregation may be aware of the personal disputes between any two members, but some may gossip, others may be indifferent, but Paul is concerned for the unity of the congregation.

Second, he assures Euodia and Syntyche of the security of their salvation. He affirms that the names of Euodia and Syntyche are “written in the book of life” (vs. 4). This is a pastoral approach especially when dealing with believers who are likely to be discouraged by disagreements.

Third, he points the disagreeing believers to the Lord. The language “agree in the Lord” (vs. 2) means that the Lord Jesus Christ should be the highest motivation for their pursuit of reconciliation. The fact that they are united in him and are both submitted to his Lordship

should incentivise their reconciliation. This is a pastoral approach to conflict resolution. The chief end of whatever we do, including conflict resolution— is the glory of God.

PREACHING NOTES (Points for explanation and application)

“We have heard ...”—the prophets preach the Word (see Isaiah 53:1), but they do not stand alone, as Elijah thought he was (1 Kings 19:9–18). Both the prophet and the people had heard this because God graciously speaks to his people.

It is pride in our hearts that leads us astray to the point where we presume that nothing can go wrong, and nothing can bring us down—not even God (vs. 3).

Edom’s hatred against Judah was a complete hatred—seven activities listed; gloat (twice), rejoice, boast, enter, loot, stand and hand over (vss. 12–14).

The prophet speaks with certainty about the destruction of the ungodly.

- Vs. 4, going to be brought down

- Vs. 7, mortally wounded
- Vs. 9, cut off by slaughter.

Vs. 15: “the day of the Lord” is one of the central themes of biblical prophecy—a period when the Lord broke into time in a very definite manner to take very decisive action:

- “Destruction from the Almighty”

(Joel 1:15)

- Visitation from “the Lord of Hosts”

(Amos 4:13)

• “Day of darkness and gloominess”, a day of “clouds and thick darkness” (Joel 2:2)

- “Day of darkness and not light”

(Amos 5:20)

• “Day of the Lord’s anger (Zechariah 2:3).

EXEGETICAL NOTES (Notes on the text, words, and grammar)

Vs. 1: “vision.” in the OT tends to point to the revelation of God to his people (see Isaiah 1:1, 29:7; Ezekiel 7:13; Daniel 8:1; Lamentation 2:9).

Vs. 1: “Obadiah” means servant (worshipper) of the Lord.

Vs. 1: “Rise up, let us rise...” is a typical summons to battle (see Jeremiah 49:14). The Lord is a man of war (Exodus 15:3).

Vs. 1: “The messenger has been sent.” In grammar this is in the perfect (past) tense, meaning it has already happened. But the events have not yet happened in time, so why does the prophet speak in the past tense? This is called the “prophetic perfect,” a technique that the prophets used often to show that the event was so certain to take place that they spoke of it as though it had already happened.

See this in relation to the suffering of Jesus on the cross (Isaiah 53:4–5).

Vs. 3: “deceived you” or “layed you astray” by pride. This is the same word used to describe how the serpent deceived Eve (Genesis 3:13).

Vs. 7: “men of peace...” or a peace-pact or trusted friends, allies (same as Psalm 41:9. See also Jeremiah 20:10; 38:22).

Vs. 8: “Wisdom ... understanding” see parallel passage in Jeremiah 49:7.

Vs. 10: “violence” a strong word for a coldblooded, merciless violation of their rights.

PREACHER'S WORKSHOP: QUESTIONS

It is always a good practice to ask the text questions. Asking the text questions will help you a lot, not only to understand the meaning of the text, but also to apply the text to your hearers.

1. What does the story teach about God?

We learn that God judges sin and the sinner (vss. 2–14) but holds out hope for those who trust him (vss. 17–21). A twofold judgement is identified as “shame shall cover you,” and “you shall be cut off forever” (vs. 10).

2. What does the story teach us about Christ?

Just as the Edomites drank the cup of wrath, Christ drank the cup of God's wrath for us (John 18:11) so that we could drink from the cup of God's salvation and blessing—at the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 10:16).

3. What does the story teach about ourselves? The judgement of God against sin

is not impulsive and haphazard, but a just and deserved judgment because “all have sinned” and are sinners by nature (see vss. 2–9) and sinners in practice (see vss. 10–14).

4. What does this story tell us to do?

This book tells us to repent of sin and look to God for salvation. This is an excellent little book to study and preach on the subject of the judgement of God against sin. The history of the Edomites shows that they were a privileged people, but it also shows us that they represent all nations (see vs. 16).

The judgement of God against sin is “our judgement,” We have brought in on ourselves (see Jeremiah 4:18).

PREACHER'S WORKSHOP: APPLICATIONS

Application is an important part of every sermon. The Bible demands a response, and we need to show our hearers how the teaching of the Bible affects us personally. Show them what God wants them to do and how God wants them to change. Apply your sermon specifically to different kinds of people, and work hard at making your sermons practical. Here is an example:

The privileged

The Edomites carried with them the sign and seal of the covenant (circumcision) as a reminder that God had condescended to relate to man, to save man. God put a protection round the Edomites and commanded the Israelites that they should not despise them because they were brothers (In Deuteronomy 2; Deuteronomy 23:7–9. Edom's guilt was all the more serious, having sinned against privilege (see Luke 12:48).

The sinner

God said, “My spirit shall not always strive with man” (Genesis 6:3). The word strive here is a word that means to contend, or to judge. There will come a time when God would no longer keep up the process of contending, convicting, and condemning the sin of men. The sun will set on the day of mercy...the night of judgment will be ushered in.

The proud

The first sin that the prophet addresses is the sin of pride (vs. 3). Pride is often considered the root of all sin, and the sin that brought Adam and Eve down. Here it is presented as the sin that deceived the Edomites. Salvation is offered to the humble, those who renounce themselves and all that they are in their sin (Psalm 34:2).

THE MESSAGE OF OBADIAH FOR TODAY

Dr. Daniel C. Timmer

riting immediately after the Babylonian invasion of Judah and the subsequent exile of many of its elite to Babylon, Obadiah focuses on the final example of Edom's mistreatment of its kinfolk in two contexts, one present and one future. First, Edom as a state trusted in its easily defended location on the rocky plateau to the southeast of Judah, taking on airs of invincibility and unaccountability (vss. 3–4). This same pride led Edom to assume that its relationships with its allies would work to its advantage when quite the opposite was true (vss. 5–9).

Edom's most flagrant sin, however, was its denial of any compassion, not to say brotherly kindness, to the Judeans who fled Judah in the face of the Babylonian attack in 586. Rather than provide shelter (which some Edomites

did; Jeremiah 40:11), the Edomites who displayed the same pragmatic, Godignoring attitudes condemned earlier in the book seized this opportunity to exact vengeance by killing these escapees (vs.14) or to benefit themselves by handing them over to the Babylonians (vs. 14).

This sin, and God's response to it, draw the events of 586 into a second context, the Day of the LORD. This "day" is in fact a progressive realization of God's punishment of sin and of his deliverance of those who repent. In the rest of Obadiah, God will first punish Edom's sin (vs. 15), and then pour out his wrath on all the "nations" who live as these Edomites did: ignoring him, despising his people, and living solely for their own benefit and glory.

Alongside this judgment he will deliver his people, defined as those who revere God and live for his glory, and bring them to a renewed Jerusalem (vs. 17) and a restored promised land (vss. 19–20) that are free of sin and that

manifest his consummated reign over all things.

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THE PASTOR AND THE WORLD: PT. 4 AN ATTITUDE OF DEPENDENCE ON GOD

Dr. Joel R. Beeke

We come to the final part of how the Christian should use the world—by an attitude of dependence on God.

In 1 Timothy 4:5 Paul says that the creatures of God which we eat are “sanctified by the word of God and prayer.” Our thanksgiving at meals is one way that we honor God.

However, honouring God and depending on him goes far beyond saying grace at meals.

The word prayer specifically means appealing to someone in power to take action. It reminds us that since God is the Creator and Lord of this world, we are dependent upon Him and receive all things by His grace alone. We express this dependence in continual prayer for God to supply the needs of his people.

Praying without ceasing involves humility. To lift up your soul to the Lord daily is to take the posture of one who cannot get what he needs and desires on his own strength. Whereas sinners look to the power, riches, and oppressive schemes of men, God tells us that men are lighter than air on his scales, and we must instead trust in the Lord and pour out our hearts before Him (Psalm 62:8–11).

This dependence teaches us contentment, for it is the exact opposite of the entitlement mentality that says, “I deserve these good things. And I deserve better.” If God created the world, then he has the right to do with it as he pleases. He is the Lord, and we are his servants, created for his glory and for his pleasure. John Calvin said that Christians “should know how to bear poverty peaceably and patiently, as well as to bear abundance moderately.”

A heart of gratitude, the mindset of a pilgrim, and an attitude of dependence distinguish a truly Christian use of the world from secular and pagan approaches. In union with Jesus Christ, we know the Creator of the world as our heavenly Father. Do you know Him as your loving and forgiving Father through Christ?

JESUS' COMPASSION FOR LOST SHEEP

Dr. R.C. Sproul

Have you ever seen a flock of sheep without a shepherd? I'll never forget the time that I was playing golf someplace in this herd of sheep came from the fields next door and started running all over the fairway, interrupting the golf game. Nobody could... We didn't know where they're going to go. They'd go this way, then they'd go that way. And one would turn in the other direction and the next group would follow them. They were all over the place. Blind, it seemed. Aimless. Sheep without a shepherd. When Jesus saw people acting like that, he wasn't angry. He felt sorry for them. "These people need a shepherd."

Oh, how I love that image. It goes through all the Old Testament and all of the prophecies of the coming Messiah who will be a shepherd king, who will be the good shepherd, who will

be the one who lays down his life for his sheep. And so in his compassion, the good shepherd looks at these human beings who are acting like sheep without a shepherd and he will address their need immediately. So he began to teach them. So he began to teach them many things and now the day was far spent. And so the disciples come to Jesus and they said, “Well, this is a deserted place. We’re outside the city now. We’re away from the villages. It’s a nice grassy plain, but it is deserted here and it’s late. Send them away.”

So then they go into the surrounding country and villages and buy themselves bread for they have nothing to eat. “Jesus, it’s time to call a halt to this. Seminar’s over. You need to send them away so they can go into the villages before it’s too late, before all the stores are closed so they can get something to eat.” Jesus said, “You feed them. I’ve been feeding them here all day. Now it’s your turn. You feed them.”

And once again, they're flabbergasted. Their gast is definitely flabbered when they hear this. They say, "How do you expect us to feed them? It would take 200 denari. It would take a year's salary to buy enough bread to feed this mob. Where are we going to get that kind of money? We don't have that kind of money here."

How many times have you heard that? We can't do this. We don't have what's necessary to accomplish this task. I learned when I was a kid, "I can't" never did anything except sit there and say whoa and alas about all the obstacles that stand before our mission. And that's the way the disciples were. "We can't do that. A whole year's salary."

Well, what do you have? See what you have. So they checked around and they said, "We've got a couple of loaves of bread and a couple of fish."

“Okay. That’s all you have? You take what you have and let me bless it, and we’ll see what God does when you give him what you have. We’ll see what God does when you do what you can do.” You do what you can do. You give what you can give and then get out of the way and watch God work.

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AUGUSTINE ON THE BIBLE

Dr. Michael Haykin

Augustine, like other Church Fathers, believed without hesitation that God is the author of the Bible. He accepted both its inspiration and its inerrancy. He used terms such as “inspire” and “dictate” to stress that the writing of Scripture was God’s initiative. God alone determined what was to be written in the pages of Holy Scripture. Augustine also consistently used the ablative case when referring to the work of the Holy Spirit in writing Scripture. In grammar, this case uses the prepositions, “from” or “with” or “by,” and then when referring to the role of the human authors he used the preposition “through.” By using this grammar, he made the same point: Scripture is wholly God’s Word—“from” God, “through” human authors.

Honouring the canon

Where he encountered individual difficulties, he either did not make a judgment or he looked for an explanation that would preserve biblical infallibility. Thus, he stated, “Only to those books which are called canonical have I learned to give honour so that I believe most firmly that no author in these books made any error in writing.”

Again, Augustine emphasized that a distinction has been made between the books written after the apostles and the authentic canon of the Old and New Testament. Sacred Scripture ... is placed high on a throne where it receives the submission of all pious and faithful intelligence.

A common persuasion

For Augustine, as for the rest of the early Christian authors, biblical inerrancy was commonly accepted. For Augustine, as one author said, “the whole Bible was free of

contradictions, mistakes and errors.” Within two years of his conversion, in 388, Augustine could write that one must “be aware that everything in the Old as well as the New Testament has been written and entrusted by one Holy Spirit.”

Augustine’s view of Scripture had a huge impact on western Christianity; “we are all Augustinians” in one way or another. Would that all who profess faith in Christ would also follow him in this conviction that Scripture was to be “placed high on a throne” in the life of the Church!

IN WRATH REMEMBER MERCY

Rev. Bartel Elshout

When the nation of Israel had declined into a state of moral corruption and decadence, God called Habakkuk to be His messenger. This decline was due to the treacherous combination of material prosperity and idolatry.

As was true in Habakkuk's day, many fail to realize how dire the situation in our own society has become. With Habakkuk, we might be inclined to conclude that the wicked are prospering and appear to be gaining the upper hand.

The reality of a morally corrupt society brought Habakkuk to his knees, and he uttered a prayer that serves as a model for our prayer when we consider our own lands; the law is slackening, judgment is not going forth, the wicked are compassing the

righteous, and wrong judgment is proceeding (Habakkuk 1:4). As with Habakkuk, our prayer must be prompted by God's speech, for a revival of God's work, and for God's mercy in the midst of judgment.

A Prayer Prompted by God's Speech

Habakkuk prayed because he heard God speak. So it must be with us. True prayer will always be informed by what God says in His Word and through His providential deeds. Thus, a prayer that is pleasing to God will be a prayer in which He hears the echo of His own Word.

When Habakkuk understood what God was saying, he was afraid—and for good reason (see also 2 Kings 22:10–13). We also need to consider our current circumstances in light of God's speech, in areas that relate to our culture, like abortion, sexual immorality and perversion, and numerous other national sins, we have reason to be afraid—that is, unless

God would do a dramatic work of revival in our generation.

A Prayer for a Revival of God's Work

We must be deeply impressed with the reality that only a revival, worked by the Holy Spirit, can bring about a genuine moral reformation of our troubled nations. Too many people put their confidence in princes and political leaders. What a vain illusion this is! At best, political reformation can only bring a cosmetic reformation of our nations. It will not address the depravity of the human heart, which is “deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jeremiah 17:9).

Thus, Habakkuk's prayer must be our fervent prayer: “O LORD, revive thy work in the midst of the years.” Revival, and revival alone, is the only hope for our sin-indulgent and morally decadent nations.

A Prayer for God's Mercy in the Midst of Judgment

We ought to recognize, therefore, that all that remains for us is Habakkuk's petition, "In wrath remember mercy." What God said to Israel, he says to us today: "Because they have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the works of their hands; therefore my wrath shall be kindled against this place, and shall not be quenched" (2 Kings 22:17).

The mercy of God is, therefore, our only hope. Having heard God's speech, we must bow at His throne of grace and beseech the God whom we (yes, we also) have provoked to wrath that He would bestow on us the very opposite of what we deserve. For Christ's sake, He is also a God of abundant mercy who, as Matthew Henry puts it, is more ready to forgive than we are to repent (Psalm 86:5).

May our humble response to God's speech thus be, "O LORD, correct [us], but with judgment; not in thine anger, lest thou bring me [us] to nothing" (Jeremiah 10:24).

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