
Commentary

Commentary on 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 self-confident (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 cold-blooded 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")

EXEGETICAL NOTES

(Notes on text, words, and grammar)

Vs. 1: "vision." in the OT tends to points 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 cold-blooded, merciless violation of their rights.

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).

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).

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).