
Biblical Theology

The Message of Obadiah for Today

Writing 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, God-ignoring 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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