

An Attempt To Listen To God

A Survey Of
The Prophecy Of Obadiah,

By

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Introduction

The book of Obadiah is the shortest book in the Old Testament having only twenty-one verses, and can be casually read in 2 1/2 minutes. Despite this, it carries a force in its teachings which are very relevant to us today. It can be viewed from at least four perspectives. They are the Historical, Prophetical, Practical and Extortive.

1) The Historical Perspective

- a) Abraham's son Isaac married Rebecca and they had twins, Jacob and Esau. In the purposes of God, He determined that the elder should serve the younger (Gen. 25:23). The firstborn was Esau and then Jacob came out taking hold of his twin's heel (Gen. 25:26). Edom came from Esau and Israel from Jacob. Before the babies were born there was conflict in Rebecca's womb, and that conflict rages throughout the centuries. No matter how hard Esau or his descendants tried, they could not break the purpose of God and gain deliverance from Israel. This being so, the Edomites became one of Israel's greatest enemies, the others being the Assyrians and the Chaldeans. Later, Zechariah was to say: "He that toucheth you (Israel) toucheth the apple of His eye" (Zech. 2:8). The children of Jacob, Israel, were God's peculiar people and there has always been, and always will be, divine retribution on those who seek their hurt. The three great enemies learnt this fact for God had a message for each of them. Through Nahum was foretold the destruction of Assyria; Habakkuk told of the fall of the Chaldeans; and Obadiah told of the destruction of Edom.
- b) When Israel was delivered from Egypt, Edom would not let them pass through their land (Num. 21:14-21). Deog, an Edomite, killed the priests of the Lord (1 Sam. 22:18); Herod, before whom our Lord stood, was an Edomite and the Lord never spoke to him (Lk. 23:8-9); and so was the Herod who killed James (Acts 12:1-2) and sought to kill Peter (Acts 12:3-4).
- c) Edom was a thorn in Israel's side and David tried to break it, but failed. (2 Sam. 8:14)
- d) When Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem, Edom rejoiced in their downfall and took part in the plundering and slaughtering of the children of Israel (Psa. 137:7; Lam. 4:22; Ezek. 25:12). The attitude of Edom is all the more startling when God commanded his people to treat Edom kindly (Deut. 23:7), but because of their cruelty, God was going to deal with them directly. This is an example of: "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place to wrath: for it is written, *Vengeance is mine; I will repay*, saith the Lord. (Rom. 12:19)

2) The Prophetical Perspective.

How beautifully some of the prophets end their books: (these are not all of them)

- a) "And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another . . . shall all flesh come to worship before me . . . and they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me." (Isa. 66:23-24)
- b) Concerning Jerusalem: "And the name of the city from that day shall be, *The Lord is there.*" (Ezek. 48:35)
- c) "Blessed is he that waiteth, and cometh to the thousand three hundred and five and thirty days . . . go thou thy way . . . and stand in thy lot at the end of the days." (Dan. 12:12-13)
- d) "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely . . . I will be as the dew unto Israel . . . Ephraim shall say, *What have I to do any more with idols?* . . . the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein." (Hos. 14:4-9)
- e) "Edom shall be a desolate wilderness . . . But Judah shall dwell forever . . . For I will cleanse their blood that I have not cleansed: for the Lord dwelleth in Zion." (Joel 3:19-21)
- f) "The host of the children of Israel shall possess that of the Canaanites . . . and the kingdom shall be the Lord's." (Obad. 1:20-21)

In that day every opposing force will be destroyed, the beast and false prophet shall be taken alive and cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 19:20). Satan shall be bound for one thousand years (Rev. 20:2); the battle of Armageddon shall be fought (Rev. 16:16; 19:19); and Jesus shall reign. What will it be like? His great and glorious reign will be unsurpassed in every way and the history of the world will be preceded by what Paul calls: "the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13); "His feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives . . . and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst" (Zech. 14:4); and then: "The Lord shall be King over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord, and His name one" (Zech 14:9). Then righteousness will reign for His kingdom shall be a kingdom, shall be: "the kingdoms of our Lord, and His Christ." (Rev. 11:15)

3) **The Practical Perspective**

- a) Since the Edomites were always opposed to the people of the Lord, they illustrate the sin nature which constantly seeks to subdue the spirit. Paul wrote: "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other" (Gal. 5:17). It is a picture of warfare in which two opposing forces seek domination over the other and neither giving up anything. It is of such a character that there will never be harmony or peace between them. Just as the only hope Israel has for deliverance and victory is through the Lord, likewise the only way for the believer to get mastery over the flesh is by Jesus Christ (Rom. 7:25). Sin rules as a king: "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body" (Rom. 6:12). There is coming a day when the full deliverance from the King Sin will be effected, and our bodies will be under joyous submission to the King of Kings.
- b) The Edomites were filled with pride (v.3), an attitude which is obnoxious to God, and with it comes the sins of independence (v.3); injury (v.10); indifference (v.11); indulgence (v.12); and interference (v.14). God does not modify their wickedness, saying "Thou shouldest not" five times over (vv. 12,13,14); He says "neither shouldest thou" three times over (vv. 12, 14). Their sin was that of trying to be neutral, which, of course, they could not be for when a decision is to be made there is no neutrality. Today we hear it said as: "I do not want to get involved".
- c) One of Satan's greatest tools is conflict and division among the saints. Very often it is over personality clashes, at others because someone is so thin skinned and takes the huffs easily, and with others the one who did the damage has a proud "I did nothing wrong" attitude, and therefore will not acknowledge the wrong. When these clicks happen they are followed by clashes, and then one saint does not care what happens the other. This is, in part, the sin of Edom. It happened in the early church (Acts 6:1), and in Corinth it was extensive (1 Cor. 1:12; 3:4).
- d) What long term damage has been done because saints acted in the flesh. There was friction in Philippi between Euodias and Syntyche (Phil. 4:2) and Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:39). Many years ago there was a contention between George Muller and J N Darby. After a time J N Darby went to Bristol to Muller's home. When the door was opened Darby asked the lady if He could see George Muller. The sad result was that Muller refused to see him, and it began a split in a denomination that continues to this day, some one hundred and twenty years later.

4) **The Extortive Perspective**

When we approach verses seventeen to twenty-one there is the breathing of comfort. It is the gospel aspect which is described despite all the sorrows experienced due to sin and the disciplining hand of God. There will be blessing at the end. Israel had known what it was to "sit down" and "we hanged our harps upon the willows" (Psa. 137:1-2). Dejection, weakness and gloom. Their ancient King Solomon had written: "Better is the end of a thing than the beginning" (Ecc. 7:8), but had they know this verse, it would have been hard to believe.

The Prophecy of Obadiah

We are no different, for there are thousands of saints across the world who have felt like or have given up. The struggles are too hard, the disappointments too great, the tunnel looks so dark, and the future empty. For some they have decided to close the bible for the last time, to pray for the last time, God had not come through when they thought He should have. Some have given up their profession of salvation, and others have been so hurt by other saints they will never recover. Is there any hope? God says to his ancient people: "You will have your inheritance, and the purpose of God for you will be fulfilled" (paraphrase of vv. 19-21). Through the writers of the New Testament the Holy Spirit caused it to be recorded:

- a) "He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it." (Phil. 1:6)
- b) "The trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth . . . might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." (1 Pet. 1:7)
- c) "Hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." (1 Pet. 1:13)

Thank God we do not need to waste life just wilting away in grief, for we have a God who "pardoneth iniquity" (Mic. 7:18); is "ready to pardon" (Neh. 9:17); and who "will abundantly pardon" (Isa. 55:7). I suppose one of the greatest verses of encouragement for the believer is: "He restoreth my soul" (Psa. 23:3).

If the evangelical perspective is enlarged, then the twin thoughts of "deliverance" and "holiness" (v.17) come into focus. By the grace and power of God we are delivered:

- a) From our relationship with Adam (Rom. 5:12-21)
- b) From the dominating power of sin (Rom. 6:12)
- c) From the law of sin and death (Rom. 8:2)
- d) From the fear of death (Heb. 2:15)

Therefore, being freed, we are expected to live lives of holiness: "Be ye holy for I am holy" (1 Pet. 1:15-16).

The Author

Obadiah was a man of whom we know absolutely nothing. Was he married like Ezekiel? We do not know. When did he prophesy? We do not know! Everything about the man is in obscurity, and it may be that the reason for this is God wants us to learn the lessons He (God) is seeking to teach us, rather than getting taken up with the man. It is a major lesson the Corinthians had to learn, for they were being taken up with the men and therefore Paul writes: "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers (servants) by whom ye believed" (1 Cor. 3:5).

There are thirteen "Obadiah's" in the scriptures, and while some have tried to say which one of the "Obadiah's" is mentioned in Kings, Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah; it is a futile search. His name means "the servant" or "the worshipper of God". Sometimes I take a walk around cemeteries and read the headstones. What a wonderful testimony it would be to have inscribed on ones headstone: "A worshipper of the true God".

When Was It Written?

It would seem that Obadiah prophesied between the taking of Jerusalem and the destruction of Edom. The reason for this is he wrote concerning "foreigners entering Jerusalem" (v.11; 2 Chron. 36:17-21), and the approaching judgment of God on Edom (v.4-9). I say "seem" because, in the Revised Version, instead of "Thou should not have looked", it has "Look not", and the change of tense indicates the possibility that the book was written before the Babylonian captivity.

Keys

- 1) Key verse: v.15 - "As thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee."
- 2) Key words: "Despised" (v.2); "Shouldest not" and its associates (v.7); "Days" (v.12)
- 3) Key truth: When anyone seeks to destroy, or refuse to assist the people of God who are in affliction, God will remember and will judge. It is one thing for God to judge his people but we must not add to their grief, nor rejoice when they fall.

Structures

As with every other Biblical book, it can be divided in different ways.

1) Divine activity

- a) Prophecies of Judgement (vv. 1-16)
- b) Prophecies of Blessing (vv. 17-21)

2) Linguistically

- a) The book is divided by two words: "for" (v.10); "for" (v.15); and "but" (v.17), thus the book is divided into 4 sections:

- i) Edom's humiliation pledged by God (vv. 1-9)

- (a) The steps in Edom's humiliation:
 - (i) The Lord was influencing the nations against Edom (v.1)
 - (ii) The nation of Edom was despised (v.2)
 - (iii) Divine judgment would use their own foolishness to deceive them (v.3)
 - (iv) They would be "brought down" (v.4), irrespective of their thoughts (v.3)
 - (v) They would be spoilt in a worse way than thieves would do (v.5-6)
 - (vi) Neighboring nations would break their covenants with them (v.7)
 - (vii) The wisdom of their counselors and strength of their mighty men would be taken away (v.8)

- ii) Edom's crime, cruelty to the people of God (vv. 10-14)

- (a) The description of Edom's sin:
 - (i) Violence against Judah (v.10)
 - (ii) When Judah called for help, they refused and stood on the other side (v.11)
 - (iii) They rejoiced in Judah's downfall (v.12)
 - (iv) They took a share in the looting (v.13)
 - (v) They hunted down those who escaped and handed them over to the Babylonians (v.14)

- iii) The reiteration of God's judgment on Edom (vv.15-16)

- (a) The divine verdict announced (v.15)
 - (b) Its severity (v.16)

- iv) Edom's doom, absolute destruction, and the glory of God (vv.17-21)

- (a) Israel will be delivered and enriched (v.17)
 - (b) Israel would be the instrument in the hand of God for Edom's destruction (v.18)
 - (c) Israel would possess the land of Edom (vv.19-20)
 - (d) The Kingdom shall be the Lord's (v.21)

3) Another structure is:

- i) God's judgment announced; the method used (vv.1-9)
- ii) God's judgment executed; the reason for it (vv.10-14)
- iii) God's judgment is certain; the recompensed judgment (v.15)

4) Another structure is:

- i) The doom of Edom (vv.1-16)
 - (a) The certainty of it (vv.1-9)
 - (b) The reason for it (vv.10-14)
 - (c) The nature of it (vv.15-16)

- ii) The triumph of Judah
 - (a) The triumph of Judah (vv.17-18)
 - (b) The possession of Judah (vv.19-20)
 - (c) The establishment of Judah (vv.21)

Major Considerations

It is irrelevant which book of the Bible one contemplates, there are primary observations that must be made.

There is in every book:

- 1) A manifestation of God. What aspect of the glory of God is revealed, or reemphasized, in this book?
- 2) A manifestation of the gospel. What aspect of the gospel is presented?
- 3) A manifestation of Christ. What revelation of His person, work or office's is there in this book?

1) What aspect of the glory of God is revealed, or re-emphasized, in Obadiah?

- a) His Sovereignty:
 - i) He has sent the ambassador (v.1)
 - ii) "I have made thee small among the heathen" (God working in the attitudes of the ungodly) (v. 2)
 - iii) "I bring thee down" (v.4)
- b) His knowledge:
 - i) "All The men of thy confederacy" (v. 7)
- c) His ability:
 - i) To execute judgment:
 - (a) "Shall I not in that day . . . even destroy the wise men out to Edom" (vv.8-9)
 - (b) "For the Lord hath spoken it" (v.18)
 - ii) To know and recall the damage done to others:
 - (a) "For the violence against thy brother" (vv.10-14)
- d) He is the God of just recompense, and therefore without partiality:
 - i) He will discipline Israel by letting them be taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar, but He will also discipline Edom for what they did (v.10). God informs us that: "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7). It is the law of just recompense.
 - (a) Edom dealt treacherously against Jerusalem vv.11-12), so by treachery it will be overthrown. (v.7)
 - (b) Edom robbed Israel (v.13), so they will be robbed. (v.5-6)
 - (c) Edom was violent against Israel (v.10), so Edom will be slaughtered. (v.4)
 - (d) Edom rejoiced over Israel in utter desolation (v.12), so Edom will be left desolate. (vv. 10 & 18)
 - (e) Edom gave aid in the disposing of Israel (v.14), so Edom will be disposed of by Israel (v.19).
 - ii) The country of Babylon learnt this (Jer. 50:29; 51:24 & 56), Adonibezek (Jud. 1:6-7) had to learn this lesson. There is coming a day when the peoples of earth will learn this (Rev. 16:6). It also applies to spiritual appreciation (Matt. 11:23).
 - iii) It contains several lessons:
 - (a) God will judge according to man's works whither those being judged are His own or not. (1 Cor. 3:13, 14; 2 Cor. 11:15; Rev. 18:6; 20:12, 13)
 - (b) This is the truth stated by Paul: "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also

reap” (Gal. 6:8)

- e) He is the God of universal accountability, an absolutely radical thought.
 - i) The ancients had an interesting way of looking at warfare. It was not just a conflict between humans but between the gods, and if the Moabites beat up the Edomites, then the god of the Moabites was stronger than the god of the Edomites. Two illustrations of this are when the ark was brought by the Philistines into the house of the god “Dagon”. It was taken that Dagon was more powerful than Jehovah (1 Sam. 5:2). Nebuchadnezzar brought the gold and silver vessels into the house of his god (Dan. 1:2). They viewed their gods as being localized beings (Jer. 25:12, 19, 20), therefore when Naaman was healed he wanted to bring back to his country some of the soil from Israel (2 Kgs. 5:17). It was a lesson Pharaoh (Ex. 12:12; 14:15-30), Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 4:30-32) and Sennacherib (2 Kgs. 19:35) had to learn.
- 2) “What aspect of the gospel is presented?”
 - a) It is a trait in humanity, resulting from the fall, that he thinks he is all sufficient for any situation. When Israel were conquering the land they decided only a few men were needed to take Ai, a decision which cost them dearly (Josh. 7:3-5). Nebuchadnezzar walked on the wall of Babylon and said: “Is not this great Babylon, that I have built”, and while he was speaking judgment fell” (Dan. 4:30-31). The nation of Edom was going to learn the same lesson. All who stand in defiance of God will be broken (Obad. 1:5-6). Men declare boldly “There probably is no God” or “Let God show Himself”. There is mocking of His name and person, and while they fear man, there is no fear of God. Their thinking is that they can do as they want and God is helpless. Obadiah declares the warning of doom for all who defy God (Isa. 13:6-13).
 - b) The good news (gospel) in Obadiah is that God will be victorious and His kingdom shall be manifested on earth. Neither civil liberties or political correctness terms God uses, but He is the God of holiness (Obad. 1:17).
 - c) Another aspect of the gospel of Obadiah is “deliverance” (Obad. 1:17). His own have been brought into liberty and the blessing of God.
 - d) Yet another truth of the gospel of Obadiah is: “The promises and purposes of God cannot be broken or hindered” (Isa. 14:6, 24-27). Whither those promises are for judgment (Jn. 3:18); invitation (Matt. 11:28), or blessing (Jn. 6:37); they will be fulfilled.
- 3) What manifestation of Christ, is there in Obadiah?
 - i) The Lord will put down every opposing force and the Kingdom shall be the Lord’s. This is an answer to the prayer, “Thy Kingdom come”(Matt. 6:10). It is then man the whole universe will see “all things put under him” (Heb 2:8), those in heaven shall rejoice “The kingdoms of the world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and His Christ and He shall reign for ever and ever” (Rev. 11:15)

I can think of no better way to close this meditation than quoting the words of David:

“He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God. And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain” (2 Sam. 23:3-4)

May God grant us good understanding as He, by His Holy Spirit, deigns to guide us into all truth.

John 16:13