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A JOURNEY THROUGH THE BIBLE

Reading: The Book of Obadiah

32. THE BOOK OF OBADIAH

The story is told of a flight attendant who was on the same plane as former heavy weight boxing champion Muhammad Ali. Everyone in the aircraft was seated for take-off. This flight attendant however, noticed that the former world champion did not have his seat belt fastened. She approached him and asked him kindly, “*Excuse me Sir, but would you mind fastening your seatbelt.*” As the story goes Muhammad Ali looked up with that saucy grin of his and said in a slow gravelly voice, “*Superman don’t need no seatbelt.*” Without missing a beat the flight attendant packed a punch with this sharp reply, “*Superman don’t need no airplane either so how about fastening up ?*” Of course Ali was only joking, if a person really believed he was Superman he would be seriously deluded. He would be like the ancient Edomites in the book of Obadiah who had been self deceived by their own pride. The truth is we all have the same tendency. A.W. Tozer described the kind of Christians the Lord longs for us to be.

Men and women, who have stopped being fooled about their own strength and are not afraid of being caught depending on their all sufficient Lord.

You see, Obadiah is a small book but it deals with the biggest sin, pride. The age of the book is unknown but the sin is the oldest of all sins. It turned an angel into a devil (Is 14:12-15) depopulated heaven (Rev 12:9) emptied Eden (Gen 3:23) and caused the Saviour to die. It keeps hearts closed to God’s salvation and thereby populates hell. One of the major themes of the book of Obadiah is pride. G. Campbell Morgan says “ *Pride of heart is that attitude of life which declares its ability to live without God.* ” My is this not what Edom sought to do ? You see, this prophecy of Obadiah, the shortest book in the Old Testament is the story of two nations and two brothers. This book deals with the family feud traced back to Jacob and Esau (Gen 25 & 27) Their descendants were known as the children of Israel and the children of Edom. The Edomites could not forget and would not forgive family differences of bygone history. They refused to help when Moses requested passage through their territory as the Israelites journeyed to the Promised Land.

They did not grieve when the Israelites got into difficulty, rather they gloated over their setbacks, looted their property and betrayed them into the hands of their enemies. They prided themselves in what they thought was an invincible mountain of Petra (v3) But Obadiah’s words were to come true. They were to become a nation reduced to nothing. Now Obadiah means “ *servant of the Lord.* ” The Bible refers to other men with the same name. Little is known about any of them and we know very little about this prophet. We have no knowledge of the prophet’s hometown, family or experience. But keep this

in mind. *It is the message not the messenger that is important.* It is God who speaks through His servant and it is God who will bring His purposes to pass. Now the background to this book is very difficult to determine, though we know it is tied to the Edomite assault on Jerusalem described for us in (10-14) Obadiah wrote shortly after this attack. There were four significant invasions of Jerusalem in O.T. history (1 Kings 14:25-26 2 Chron 12:1 2 Kings 14:1 2 Chron 25:1) But only two fit with the historical data that is given here. The two main views are, first by the Philistines and Arabians in 848 B.C. (2 Chron 21:16-17) the second by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. (2 Kings 25 2 Chron 36) Most of the experts who have tried to tie Obadiah's prophecy into his nation's history suggests that it points towards what happened when the Babylonians ravaged Jerusalem in 586 B.C. as recorded in (2 Kings Ch 25) And we assume that Obadiah has 586 B.C. in mind.

So try and picture this scene. *The time is 586 B.C. the place is Jerusalem, the event is the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonian armies.* We see the angry soldiers as they wreck the walls, slay the people and burn the city. But we see something else. We see a group of neighbouring citizens, the Edomites as they stand on the other side and encourage the Babylonians to ruin the city. " *Raise it, raise it,*" they are calling, " *Dash their little children against the stones and wipe out the Jews.*" (Ps 137:7-9) Who are these people who desire such terrible things ? They are brethren to the Jews. As I have said the Edomites were the descendants of Esau, Jacob's older brother. (Gen 25:21-26) Do you recall that God

chose Jacob and rejected Esau. Esau moved to the mountains in the south and established the Edomite kingdom Idemaea but they remained enemies. And now Obadiah is foretelling Edom's certain doom. Do you know something ? Anti-Semitism eventually brings the judgment of God. Nations that curse and persecute Jews will reap what they sow. Why ? Because they are attacking a people with whom the Lord has a long standing, unconditional and irrevocable covenant. (Gen 12:1-13) On the other hand nations that bless the Jews will enjoy God's blessing. Now this book of Obadiah falls into three sections.

(1) PREDICTION 1-9 WHAT WILL HAPPEN

For Obadiah tells the Edomites that the nations are going to destroy them and that unlike burglars who just take the things they are interested in, they will take everything including their territory. (5-6) Ginsburg, the great Hebrew scholar, translated Obadiah 6 like this, " How are the things of Esau stripped bare." In other words, they are laid out in the open for you to look at for the first time. Obadiah puts the microscope down on Esau, and when you look through the eyepiece you see Edom. Now in these verses,

(a) God's Sovereignty needs to be Recognised:

Jeremiah had already announced the doom of Edom in (Jer 49:7-22) in fact there are some quotations from this prophecy here in Obadiah. This is the " *report,*" or

“*rumour*,” that Obadiah had heard. The Lord was going to avenge Israel and destroy Edom. The Lord had told Obadiah that an ambassador from a nation allied with Edom was visiting the other nations to convince their leader to join forces and attack Edom. Actually, it was the Lord who had ordained this change in policy and what appeared to be another diplomatic visit was the working out of His purposes against Edom. This was the beginning of the fulfilment of (v 7) John Wesley said he read the newspaper “*to see how God was governing His world*,” and that is certainly a biblical approach. “*The most High ruleth in the kingdom of men and giveth it to whomsoever he will.*” (Dan 4:17) It does not mean that God is to blame for wicked decisions that government officials make, but it does mean God is on the throne and working out His perfect will. Does this not bring encouragement to your heart ? We often grieve as we watch world events, and the suffering that one nation inflicts on another. We wonder at times why God permits certain things to happen, But God is in control. He sees the big picture and He knows the end from the beginning.

(b) Edom’s History needs to be Scrutinised:

Look if you will at (v1) The prophecy was directed against Edom. Now this little country bordered Judah in the north, ran south all the way to the Gulf of Aquaba and bordered the desert in the east. It was about twenty to thirty miles wide and about a hundred miles long. Edom was a wild, rugged, mountainous and almost inaccessible land. It had cliffs that had towered as high as 5,000 feet above sea level. Its deep ravines were easily defended. Its

major cities were Bozrah in the north, Teman in the south and Sela or Petra in the centre. The city of Petra was thought to be impregnable because of its precarious position and difficulty of access. Now the name Edom means “*red*.” It was the name that was given to Esau because he had red hair (Gen 25:25) and sold his birth-right for some of Jacob’s “*red*,” pottage or stew. Now in order to clarify the identity of Edom lets go back to (Gen 36:1) Do you see (36:1) ? Look also at (Gen 36:8-9) Esau is Edom and Edom is Esau. The Edomites were those who were descended from Esau, just as the Israelites are those who are descended from Jacob. And the long warfare between the Israelites and the Edomites began in the womb of Rebekkah.

“*And the children struggled together within her, and she said, if it be so, why am I thus ? And she went to inquire of the Lord. And the Lord said unto her, two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger.*” (Gen 25:22-23) From the very beginning these two brothers were struggling against each other. Esau was an outdoor fellow who loved to hunt. Jacob would rather stay in the house and learn to cook. He was tied to his mamma’s apron strings. However, Jacob had a spiritual discernment that Esau did not have. Esau was a man of the flesh and did not care for spiritual things. In fact, he so discounted his birthright that he traded it to Jacob for a bowl of soup. (Gen 25:29-34) My Jacob and Esau lived in a state of perpetual antagonism as did their descendants. It is so sad when a family is wrecked by

bitterness, division and antagonism. You see, the Edomites were Israel's most persistent enemy. They refused to allow the Israelites passage through their land on the way to Canaan. (Num 20:14-21) Israel was instructed not to hate Edom because they were related. (Deut 23:7) But the hostility lasted for centuries (Eze 35:5) especially with Saul (1 Sam 14:47) David (2 Sam 8:13-16) Joab ((1 Kings 11:16) and Solomon (1 Kings 11:17-22) The Edomites had a fierce hatred of Israel. Instead of coming to Israel's aid they always allied themselves with the surrounding nations to oppress Israel. They failed to recognize that this hostility to the Jews was hostility to God and that their anti-Semitic policies had sowed the seeds of their destruction. “ *There is none understanding in him,*” (v 7) cried Obadiah. My is history not repeating itself ? Think of the hatred of the Arab and Muslim nations that surround Israel today.

Although they are related by blood they hate the Jews with a passion equaled only by that of Edom of old. These anti-Semitic nations make alliances with one another, make common cause with Russia, and will even side with the Antichrist against Israel. What they don't understand is that their bitter hatred of the Jews will bring them to grief. (a) (b)

(c) Man's Arrogancy needs to Neutralised:

Look if you will at (v 3) Edom was a small nation but it was a proud one. Do you see what they were proud of ?

They were Proud of their Security:

For they are described as “ *thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high that saith in his heart Who shall bring me down to the ground ?*” (v 3) This land of Edom today part of Jordan was also known as the land of Seir. (Gen 32:3) Like the eagles the Edomites lived in the rocks and looked down from the heights with disdain on the nation's around them. Edom felt invincible and impregnable because of her natural defenses. Before the Titanic left Southampton for her fateful maiden voyage a passenger by the name of Mrs. Albert Caldwell asked a crewman if the ship was really unsinkable. Do you know what he said ? “ *God Himself could not sink this ship.*” This was the spirit that prevailed in Edom

They were Proud of their Prosperity:

Located on several major trade routes Edom could amass riches through these lucrative trade routes.

They were Proud of their Diplomacy:

Obadiah speaks of the “ *men of thy confederacy,*” (v7) he mean their allies which indicates that Edom had established a network of allies among the surrounding nations. They knew how to make friends and influence people.

They were Proud of their Army:

Obadiah refers to them “ *as mighty men.*” (v9) Yet none of them could save Edom when the Lord decreed that its

cities would become a slaughterhouse. Now can you see how proud this small nation was ?

They were Proud of their Philosophy:

Look if you will at (v8) In keeping with their free-thinking, the Edomites gained a reputation for shrewdness and worldly wisdom. Do you recall that Eliphaz one of Job's friends was a Temanite ? (Job 4:1) The Herods, unprincipled statesmen known for cleverness, scheming and lack of ideals were Edomites. But Obadiah says the wise men of Edom were destined for the sword. Pride. My we tend to be easy on pride but God never is. Do you know what the book of Proverbs says ? “ *Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord,*” (16:5) “ *These six things doth the Lord hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him,*” (6:6-19) Do you know what is number one on God's hate parade ? “ *A proud look.*” Why is pride singled out in this way ? Because it dethrones God, and replaces him with man. We can be proud of our education, our ability, our achievements, our possessions, our homes, our kids, our titles, our positions in business, society or in the church.

The word “ *pride,*” itself occurs some forty eight times in Scripture and the word “ *proud,*” about fifty seven times. An equivalent phrase is “ *lifted up his heart,*” which is frequently mentioned in the Bible. There are different forms of pride. **There is Pride of Face:** the multi-million cosmetic industry is evidence of that. Women are induced continually to buy perfume and paints, cosmetics and creams all guaranteed to produce artificial beauty. Now

don't misunderstand me there is nothing spiritual about women looking like an unmade bed. **There is Pride of Race:** some think because they are born in a certain country they are “ *the people.*” **There is Pride of Grace:** and “ *spiritual pride is the most arrogant of all brands of pride.*” This was the form of pride afflicting Jehu when he haughtily said to Jehonadab “ *Come with me and see my zeal for the Lord.*” (2 Kings 10:16) The story is told of C. H. Spurgeon who one Sunday preached a masterly sermon. As soon as he had finished his message the devil whispered to him, “ *Spurgeon, that was a fine sermon you preached magnificently.*” For a moment he agreed with the devil. Leaving his pulpit he was met by a loyal deacon at the foot of the pulpit stairs who started to say, “ *Mr. Spurgeon that was a masterpiece.*” Spurgeon however, interrupted the well meaning deacon saying, “ *My friend you're too late. The devil told me that a few moments ago.*”

My there is no part of life that is ring fenced against pride. It is even possible to be proud of one's supposed humility. Someone has said, “ *Every day and in a thousand ways I am tempted to make myself the centre of the universe.*” Are there not echoes of that in us all ? Yet the Bible says, “ *God resisteth the proud but giveth grace to the humble.*” (James 4:6)

*Oh, why should the spirit of man be proud ?
Like a fast-flitting meteor and a fast flying cloud
A flash of lightening and break of the wave,
He passes from life to his rest in the grave*

(d) Scripture's Typology needs to be Emphasised:

Now when we talk about typology what do we mean ? Well according to Baker's Dictionary of Theology "*a type is a shadow cast on the pages of Old Testament history by a truth whose full embodiment or antitype is found in the New Testament revelation.*" A type is a figure or picture of something to come. You see, what is so important about these two men and these two nations is this. They set before us a similar struggle described in the New Testament the Christians struggle between the flesh and the spirit. Do you recall Paul's words ? "*For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh and these are contrary the one to the other so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.*" (Gal 5:17) These are the two natures of the believer, the new nature and the old nature. They are opposed to each other. Esau pictures the flesh, the old nature, and Jacob pictures the Spirit, the new nature. Now the flesh stands for that part of man's nature wherein his natural desires have free rein. (Rom 7:18) "*And the flesh lusteth against the Spirit,*" (Gal 5:17) Or "*the sinful desires what is contrary to the Spirit.*"

Think about this. One Sunday morning your new nature wants to get up, go to church, and hear the Word and remember the Lord. But your old nature (Esau) fights it. "*You are tired,*" an inner voice says. "*You've had a tough week, don't get up so early. Have a rest.*" Have you ever known that struggle ? The old nature wants to look at a filthy program and the new nature says "*those scenes will pollute your mind.*" My conflict's like these exist

in a thousand different scenarios every day of life. And this conflict is illustrated for us in Edom and Israel and Esau and Jacob. (1)

**(2) DENUNCIATION 10-14
WHY IT WILL HAPPEN**

So first of all the prophet declares that God would judge Edom and take away everything the nation boasted about and depended on for security. (v 2-9) Then in the second place Obadiah explained why God was judging Edom. It was because Edom had done three unforgiveable things. Encouraging Judah's foes, enjoying Judah's fall and enslaving Judah's fugitives. Incidentally, did you notice that Edom's evils are introduced with the words "*Thou shouldest not,*" (v12, v13 v14) You see,

(a) There was Encouragement for Judah's Foes:

In 586 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon mounted a massive attack against Judah, concentrating his fiercest fire on Jerusalem. "*He slew their young men with the sword and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man of him that stopped for age and all the vessels of the house of God, great and small and the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king and of his princes, all these he brought to Babylon. And they burnt the house of God, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire, and destroyed all the goodly vessels thereof. And them that had escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon.*" (2 Chron 36:17-20) Can you picture it ? It was

the darkest day in Hebrew history. Jerusalem and the temple lay in ruins. And what did the Edomites do ? They applauded and helped the conquerors. Do you see what (v10-11) says ? I mean the Edomites could have thrown their weight behind their neighbours instead they opted to sit on their hands and let the Babylonians do their worst. Indeed the Lord says, “ *you were just like one of them .* ” By not helping Judah the Edomites were as guilty as those who were ravaging Jerusalem. Indeed do you know what the Edomites were doing while Jerusalem was under attack ? They were shouting “ *Raise it, raise it even to the foundation thereof.* ” (Ps 137:7) Isn't that an interesting phrase in (v11) “ *In the day that thou stoodest on the other side.* ” Does that not remind you of the priest and the Levite in the parable of the Good Samaritan ? The wounded man was lying on the road “ *And by chance there came down a certain priest that way and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite when he was at the place came down and looked on him and passed by on the other side.* ” (Lk 10:31)

You would have expected these two religious workers to do something for the victim at the side of the road but as far as they were concerned he was a nuisance to avoid. In March 1964 twenty eight year old Catherine Genovese arrived home at her Kew Gardens apartment building. She had worked the late shift and it was 3am in the morning. A man approached her out of the darkness and began stabbing her repeatedly. She screamed out “ *He stabbed me. Help me.* ” A neighbor opened his window and shouted, “ *Let that girl alone.* ” The attacker ran away leaving Catherine Genovese wounded and staggering.

When no-one came out of the building to help her, the attacker returned. She fought him. But he continued stabbing her, then he sexually assaulted her, and took 49 \$ from her purse and left her in the hallway of the apartment building. The assault lasted about thirty minutes. At least a dozen neighbor's were aware of the attack and heard Kitty cry for help. Only after the attacker left did one of those neighbors finally call the police. She died in the ambulance on the way to hospital. “ *Thou stoodest on the other side,* ” “ *And passed by on the other side.* ” My if we go through life wanting to have our own way then the people who need us will be nuisances to us. But if we go through life seeking to share the love of the Lord then every nuisance will become an opportunity for ministry to glorify the Lord. (a)

(b) There was Enjoyment at Judah's Fall:

Do you see (v12) ? While Judah was reeling the Edomites were rejoicing, cheering on the Babylonians as they tore the city apart. Can you imagine it ? “ *That will teach these despicable Jews a lesson,* ” someone would have called out. “ *Come on Edom,* ” another probably shouted, “ *What are we waiting for ? Let's get in on the action. This is the day we have been hoping for.* ” (Deut 23:7-8) For the Jews this was a day of distress, but for the Edomites it was a day of delight. In their pride they looked down on the Jews and gloated over their misfortune. Do you recall the counsel that is given to us in the book of Proverbs ? “ *Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth. Lest the Lord see it and it displease him and he turn away*

his wrath from him.” (Prov 24:17-18) I wonder at times are we like the Edomites ? Are we “*silent spectators,*” when our brothers fall into difficulty ? Do you know a Christian who has fallen into sin or some difficulty ? What is your attitude to them ? Or you helping them ? Or do you delight in digging out the details and spreading the news ? Do you know a neighboring church declining in numbers whose every existence is threatened ? Do you feel a smugness, a satisfaction, a superiority about that ? What about some minister of the gospel who is fallen ? Do you kick him when he is down or do you extend the helpful brotherly hand ? (a) (b)

(c) *There was Enslavement for Judah’s Fugitives:*

This was the crowning act of wickedness. It was bad enough for people to do nothing to help their brothers, and to stand and rejoice at their brothers calamities but when they gave aid to the enemy that was carrying this “**family feud,**” too far. Do you see what was happening ? When the Jews were trying to escape from the city of Jerusalem the Edomites stood at the forks in the roads waiting to capture them and hand them over to the Babylonians, who hauled them away to slavery. Look if you will (13-14) Do you recall what the prophet Jehu said to the King Jehoshaphat ? “*Shouldest thyself help the ungodly and love them that hate the Lord ?*” (2 Chron 19:2) As the Lord’s people we must love our enemies and pray for them (Matt 5:44-48) but we certainly should not assist sinners in opposing and persecuting believers. To do so is turn traitor in the army of the Lord. Now can you see Edom’s sin ? Well, look finally at Edom’s doom. (1) (2)

**(3) CONSUMMATION 15-21
HOW IT WILL HAPPEN**

You know, at the time Obadiah wrote this prophecy Edom seemed far more likely to survive than Judah, yet history has strikingly endorsed this prophecy, for God said concerning Edom ? “*Thou shalt be cut off for ever.*” (v10) In other words,

(a) *A Just Retribution will be Executed:*

Now the judgment in (v15) has a near and a far fulfillment. Like so many prophecies Obadiah’s words would have a partial fulfilment for Edom and a later fulfillment for the end time foes of Israel. For as we have noted “*the day of the Lord,*” is a time when God will pour out His wrath upon a wicked world, judge the nations and then establish His kingdom, thus fulfilling the promises made to Israel. But this phrase was also use to describe God ordained calamities sent to punish people at any time, and these judgments were foretastes of the future worldwide “*day of the Lord.*” Do you see the reasoning behind the punishment ? “*As thou hast done it shall be done unto thee.*” (v 15) God would treat them the way they treated the Jews. Scholars call it poetic justice. They were traitors to the Jews, therefore their own allies would betray them. (v 11)

They plundered and looted so their nation would be robbed. (v 5-6) Edom was violent so they would be cut off completely. (9-10) Edom wanted the Jews to be destroyed so she would be destroyed by Babylon

(v 10, v18) It would seem that the Edomites fell before Babylon some five years after they had helped that nation to destroy Jerusalem. (Jer 27:3-6 Mal 1:3) And by the third century A.D. their name had perished. *But in the end times all nations including a latter day Edom will come up against the nation of Israel.* My the rebirth of the state of Israel in our day heralds the approaching fulfilment of Obadiah's end time prophecy. The ancient arena is fast becoming the modern arena. The old land of Edom is now part of the modern country of Jordan which joins with Arab nations in their hostility towards Israel. No doubt this nation will play its part in the battle of Armageddon, on the side of the Beast, in seeking to exterminate the Jewish people once and for all, fully and forever. But they will not succeed. For "*as thou hast done it shall be done unto thee,*" (v 15) God will see to it that justice is done and retribution will be executed. But if on the one hand a just retribution will be executed, on the other hand,

(b) A Joyous Restoration will be Experienced:

Did you notice the first word of (v 17) "*But.*" Mark well the "*buts,*" of the Bible. They are hinges on which great events and doctrines turn "*But upon Mount Zion shall be deliverance and there shall be holiness and the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions.*" The Lord did deliver His people from Babylonian captivity and He will again deliver them in the last days and establish His kingdom. Did you notice the word "*shall,*" appearing no less than twelve times in the last verses ? (v17, v18, v19, v20 v21) It's a word of certainty. It stresses the fact that

what God has promised He will most certainly perform. And what has God promised ? **Rescue:** (v17) **Revenge:** (v18) **Restoration:** (v 19 -20) **Reign** (v21) Not even during the great days of David and Solomon did Israel possess more than an tenth of the total land grant that is hers under the Abrahamic Covenant. But she will. "*And the kingdom shall be the Lord's.*" (v21) What a wonderful way to end this brief book. Today, the King has been rejected, and David's throne is empty in Jerusalem. The Jews are in the sad condition described in the book of Hosea. They are without king, priest, sacrifice or priesthood. But when Christ returns the nation will look upon Him whom they have pierced, they will be cleansed and forgiven, and the kingdom will be established.

Daniel saw Christ the Stone come down and crush the all the kingdoms of the world. My no matter what may happen to the affairs of Israel as the Gentile nations seek to control her or capture her, you can be sure that God will watch over this people and will one day give them their promised kingdom. "*And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed.*" (Dan 2:44) "*And Jesus shall reign where're the sun.*" My are you saved ? Is your family saved ? Have you a relative yet not saved ? Are you just letting them go to hell ?

**O give us all a passion
For souls as ne'er before
To warn men and to tell them
The Judge is at the door**

