

The Minor Prophets
Lesson 21: The Tale of Two Brothers
(Obadiah)

Introduction To Obadiah:

- **Key People:** The Edomites
- **Date Written:** Possibly during the reign of Jehoram in Judah, 855-840 BC, or possibly during Jeremiah's ministry, 627-586 BC.
- **Purpose:** To show that God judges those who have harmed His people.
- **Author:** Obadiah. Very little is known about this man, whose name means "servant (or worshiper) of the Lord."
- **To whom written:** The Edomites, the Jews in Judah, and God's people everywhere.
- **Setting:** Historically, Edom had constantly harassed the Jews. Prior to the time this book was written, they had participated in attacks against Judah. Given the dates above, this prophecy came after the division of the northern and southern kingdoms and before the conquering of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC.
- **The Christ of Obadiah:** Christ is seen in Obadiah as the Judge of the nations (5-16), the Savior of Israel (17-20), and the Possessor of the kingdom (21).
- **The Key Verses:** "For the day of the Lord draws near on all nations. As you have done, it will be done to you. Your dealings will return on your own head" (Obadiah 1:15 NASB).
- **Theme:** Nations and individuals reap what they sow.

Introduction: Of all human conflicts, the most painful and difficult to resolve are those between blood relatives. But if family feuds are tragic, national feuds are even worse. Almost every nation has experienced a civil war, with brother killing brother in order to perpetuate a long-standing disagreement that nobody fully understands or wants to settle. History records that the roots of these disputes are bitter, long, and deep, and that every attempt to pull them up and destroy them usually meets with failure.

Esau and Jacob were twin brothers who had been competitors from before birth (Gen. 25:19-26). Unfortunately, their parents disagreed over the boys, with Isaac partial to Esau and Rebekah favoring Jacob. God had chosen Jacob, the younger son, to receive the blessing attached to the Abrahamic covenant (Rom. 9:10-12), but Jacob and Rebekah decided to get this blessing by scheming instead of trusting God (Gen. 27).

When Esau learned that his clever brother had stolen the blessing, he resolved to kill him after their father was dead, and this led to Jacob's leaving home to find a wife among his mother's relatives (vv. 41-46). Year's later, the two brothers experienced a brief time of reconciliation (chap. 32), and they both faithfully attended the burial of Isaac (35:27-29), but the animosity was never removed. Esau established the nation of Edom (25:30; 35:1; 36:1), and his descendants carried on the family feud that Esau had begun years before.

The law of Moses commanded the Jews to treat the Edomites like brothers: "You shall not abhor an Edomite, for he is your brother" (Deut. 23:7 NKJV). In spite of this, the Edomites "harbored an ancient hostility" against Israel (Ezek. 35: 5 NIV) and used every opportunity to display it.

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In this brief book, Obadiah the prophet delivered three messages from the Lord.

I. God's Message to Edom's Neighbors (Obadiah 1)

Like Isaiah (1:1), Micah (1:1), Nahum (1:1), and Habakkuk (1:1), the prophet Obadiah received his message from the Lord by means of a vision. "Surely the Lord God does nothing unless He reveals His secret counsel to His servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7 NASB). Obadiah wrote the vision so it could be shared with others and eventually become a part of the Holy Scriptures.

The Lord enabled Obadiah to know what was going on among the nations that were allied with Edom against Judah. Today, we have international media coverage and the instant transmission of information, so very little can happen in political and diplomatic arenas without the world knowing about it. But, in Obadiah's day, the travels of national leaders and their political discussions were secret.

- God told His servant that an ambassador from a nation allied with Edom was visiting the other nations to convince their leaders to join forces and attack Edom.
- Actually, it was the Lord who had ordained this change in policy, and what appeared to be just another diplomatic visit was actually the working of the Lord's judgments against Edom. This was the beginning of the fulfillment of the prophecy in Obadiah 7, "All your allies will force you to the border" (NIV).
- Many have said the "History is His story." This doesn't mean that God is to blame for the foolish or wicked decisions and deeds of government officials, but it does mean that He is on the throne and working out His perfect will.
- Knowing that the Lord reigns over all things ought to encourage the people of God as we watch world events and grieve over the decay of people and nations.
- The sovereignty of God isn't an excuse for the believers to be indifferent to evil in the world, nor is it an encouragement to slumber carelessly and do nothing. We must continue to still pray "Thy will be done" (Matt. 6:10) and then be available to obey whatever He tells us to do.

II. God's Message to Edom (Obadiah 2-16)

There are two parts to this message. First, the prophet declared that God would judge Edom and take away everything the nation boasted about and depended on for security (vv. 2-9). Second, Obadiah explained why God was judging Edom and named four ways in which the Edomites had sinned against the Jews and the Lord (vv. 10-16)

A. Divine Judgment declared (Obadiah 2-9). What kind of judgment did God promise to send to the nation of Edom?

1. Edom's pride brought down (Obadiah 2-4)

- a) Edom was a proud nation that considered itself impregnable and invulnerable because it was situated "in the clefts of the rock" (v.3), a region of rugged

mountains with high cliffs and narrow valleys that would dissuade any invader from attacking.

- b) Like the eagles, the Edomites lived on the rocks and looked down from the heights with disdain upon the nations around them.
 - c) The Edomites thought they were a great people, but God said He would make them small, which means, “paltry.” “Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall” (Prov. 16:18 NIV).
2. Edom’s wealth plundered (Obadiah 5-6)
- a) Located on several major trade routes, Edom could amass the riches of other nations; out of the mountains, they could dig copper and other minerals.
 - b) Because of their isolation, they didn’t have to worry about making treaties with the larger nations or helping to finance expensive wars.
 - c) But their wealth would be no more. Unlike ordinary thieves, their plunderers would take everything they could find, and unlike grape harvesters, they would leave nothing behind for others. This would be the end of Edom and its boasted wealth.
3. Edom’s alliances broken (Obadiah 7)
- a) Though protected by their lofty heights, the Edomites were smart enough to know that they needed friends to help them stand against the great empires that frequently threatened the smaller Eastern nations. Edom would also want allies to assist them in their constant feud with Israel (see Ps. 83:5-8).
 - b) But, God would turn these friends into enemies, and those who had eaten with them and made covenants of peace would break those covenants. While pretending to be friends, their allies would turn into traitors, set a trap, and catch Edom by surprise.
4. Edom’s wisdom destroyed (Obadiah 8)
- a) God also warned that Edom’s wisdom would be destroyed. The people of the East were known for their wisdom (1 Kings 4:30), and this included the Edomites. Located as they were on the great trade routes the leaders of Edom could get news and views from many nations.
 - b) Without wisdom, the leaders of Edom couldn’t make the right decisions, and the results would be confusion.
5. Edom’s army defeated (Obadiah 9)
- a) Without wisdom, the military leaders wouldn’t know how to command their troops, and their mighty men would be defeated. This may have happened when the Babylonians took Jerusalem, or this promise may have been fulfilled when the Arabs invaded Edom and took over their cities, driving the Edomites to the west.

B. Divine judgment defended (Obadiah 10-16)

Having announced what God was going to do to Edom, Obadiah then proceeded to defend God’s judgment of the nation. The Edomites were guilty of at least four abominable sins:

1. Violence against the Jews (Obadiah 10-11)

- a) The Edomites were guilty of using violence against their brothers, the Jews. When their founder Esau, discovered he was deprived of his father's blessing, he determined to kill his brother, Jacob (Gen. 27:41), and this malicious attitude was passed along to his descendants.
 - b) If you had to asked them, "Are you your brother's keeper?" they would have replied, "No! We're our brother's killer!" Instead of assisting their brothers in their plight, the Edomites stood "on the other side" (see Luke 10: 30-32) and watched the enemy soldiers cast lots for the spoils, including the captive Jews, who would become slaves.
2. Rejoicing at the Jews' plight (Obadiah 12)
- a) Not only did the Edomites ignore the plight of the Jews, but they rejoiced at what the enemy was doing (Obad.12; Ezek. 35:15; 36:5). For the Jews, this was a day of destruction and distress; but for the Edomites, it was a day of delight and rejoicing.
 - b) In their pride, Edom looked down on the Jews and gloated over their misfortune. Again, Solomon has counsel for us: "Do not gloat when your enemy falls; when he stumbles, do not let your heart rejoice, or the Lord will see and disapprove and turn his wrath away from him" (Prov. 24:17-18 NIV). God didn't spare the Jews, but He did send judgment on Edom in due time.
3. Assisting the enemy (Obadiah 13-14)
- a) It was bad enough for people to do nothing to help their brothers, and to stand and rejoice at their brother's calamities, but when they gave aid to the enemy, that was carrying their ancient family feud too far.
 - b) The Edomites entered the city and shared in dividing up the spoils, thus robbing their brothers of their wealth.
 - c) The Edomites stood at the forks of the roads, ready to capture the fugitives who were trying to escape; and they turned them over to the enemy to be imprisoned or slain.
4. Ignoring God's wrath (Obadiah 15-16)
- a) Edom's fourth sin was that of ignoring the impending wrath of God. "For the day of the Lord draws near on all the nations" (v.15 NABS), and that included Edom, but Edom was proud and didn't care about what the Lord might do to them.
 - b) "Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 7:12 NKJV). We call this statement "the Golden Rule," and it points out a positive approach to personal relationships.
 - c) But Obadiah 15 gives the negative side: "As you have done, it will be done to you. Your dealings will return on your own head" (NASB). See Galatians 6:7.
 - d) Edom had drunk in joyful celebration at Jerusalem's fall, but all the nations will one day drink of the cup of wrath that God will hand them—a cup they cannot refuse.
 - e) No matter how discouraging the day may be for God's people, there is a just God in heaven who pays sinners back in kind: What they did to others is ultimately done to them. "The righteous is delivered from trouble, and it comes to the wicked instead" (Prov. 11:8 NKJV). Indeed, God's judgments are true and righteous (Rev. 16:7)

III. God's Message to the Jewish People (Obadiah 17-21)

Now that the prophecy about Edom has been delivered, Obadiah turns to his own people and announces three divine promises.

A. God will deliver them (Obadiah 17-18)

- a) God did deliver His people from Babylonian captivity, and He will again deliver them in the last days and establish His kingdom. Mount Zion will be consecrated to the Lord and all defilement removed.
- b) "Jacob" refers to the southern kingdom and "Joseph" the northern kingdom. They will be united in to one nation and enter the messianic kingdom together, possessing the inheritance promised to them.
- c) It appears from Isaiah 11:10-16, a parallel passage, that Moab and Edom will be restored as nations in the last days, but the Jews will burn them as stubble.

B. God will defeat their enemies (Obadiah 19-20)

- a) Israel will reclaim land formerly inhabited by the Edomites (the Negev), Philistines (the Shephelah), and the Samaritans (Ephraim). The Jews have been struggling to possess their inheritance for centuries, but other powers have always stood in the way.
- b) The Jews will "possess their possessions" (v.17) without the help of any nation, but only through the help of the Lord their God.
- c) Israel has returned to their land in unbelief, and the nation was established in 1948. However, one day they shall see their Messiah and believe on Him, and the nation will be "born in a day" (Isa. 66:8; Zech. 12:10-13:1; 14:1-9).

C. God will establish their kingdom (Obadiah 21)

- a) The Lord will reign from Mount Zion, where His temple will stand, "and all the nations will stream to it" (Isa. 2:2 NASB). It is interesting to note the King Messiah will have "deliverers" ("saviors" KJV) assist Him in His rule over the nations. This fact should be studied with reference to our Lord's promises to His apostles, (Matt. 19:27-30) and those who are faithful to Him today (24:42-51; 25:14-30); Luke 19:11-27).
- b) Jesus teaches that faithfulness to Him today will mean reigning with Him in the kingdom.
- c) All of God's children look forward to the day when the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdom of our Lord, and He shall reign forever and ever (Rev. 11:15). Then every knee shall bow to Him and every tongue confess that he is Lord of all.

Meanwhile, God's people must do all they can to get the gospel out to the billions of people in this world who have never had the opportunity to hear the name of Jesus or learn how to trust Him and be saved. When the great and terrible day of the Lord dawns, the nations of the world will be judged for the way they have treated one another and the nation of Israel. ***Until that day dawns, God's church must keep praying, "Thy kingdom come" and seek to obey His command to take the gospel to the whole world.***

Questions For Personal Reflection Or Group Discussion

1. What is at the root of bitter feuds? What is so powerful that the participants don't even desire an end to the feud?
2. What is the worst example of a feud that you know of?
3. What is the answer to a long-standing, bitter feud? How might this affect your country's foreign policy?
4. What was the purpose of Obadiah's vision?
5. How do you see God's sovereignty at work in the world? What can we do to cooperate with His plans?
6. How should it affect our actions to know that God reigns over all of history?
7. Why does God especially hate prideful arrogance in people and nations?
8. For which sins was God going to judge Edom? Why is this helpful for us to reflect on?
9. When has application of the Golden Rule influenced your behavior?
10. What can we hope for in the future? How can we nurture this hope and keep it fresh and alive?

Homework: Lifestyle Priorities: Living with Purpose in a Fast-paced World. Read John 17:6-19, "The Unusual Arrangement."