

Walk Through The Bible

*The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul;
The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;
8The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;
The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;
9The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever;
The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.
10More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold;
Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.
11Moreover by them Your servant is warned, And in keeping them there is great reward.
(Psalm 19:7-11. NKJV)*

*25But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.
(James 1:25. NKJV)*

Against Your Brother Jacob

November 25th, 2012

Obadiah

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Introduction:

Open your Bibles this morning to the Book of Obadiah. We are drawing near the end of our Walk Through The Bible journey and we are reaching the part of the Bible that tends to be a little bit foreign to most of us. Not a lot of highlighting in Obadiah in most of our Bibles. As I was preparing for this message I realized that not only have I never preached a sermon on Obadiah before, I cannot recall ever having heard a sermon on Obadiah before, so we are all of us breaking new ground this morning. Part of the reason we don't hear many sermons on Obadiah is just because it is so small. Obadiah is the shortest book in the Old Testament. It is just 21 verses long and so because of that, we are going to do something we have never done before. We are going to read an entire book of the Old Testament in church this morning, hope you brought a snack. Let me read to you from God's Holy Word:

¹The vision of Obadiah.

Thus says the Lord GOD concerning Edom
(We have heard a report from the LORD,
And a messenger has been sent among the nations, *saying*,
"Arise, and let us rise up against her for battle"):

- 2 “Behold, I will make you small among the nations;
You shall be greatly despised.
- 3 The pride of your heart has deceived you,
You who dwell in the clefts of the rock,
Whose habitation is high;
You who say in your heart, ‘Who will bring me down to the ground?’
- 4 Though you ascend *as* high as the eagle,
And though you set your nest among the stars,
From there I will bring you down,” says the LORD.
- 5 “If thieves had come to you,
If robbers by night—
Oh, how you will be cut off!—
Would they not have stolen till they had enough?
If grape-gatherers had come to you,
Would they not have left *some* gleanings?
- 6 “Oh, how Esau shall be searched out!
How his hidden treasures shall be sought after!
- 7 All the men in your confederacy
Shall force you to the border;
The men at peace with you
Shall deceive you *and* prevail against you.
Those who eat your bread shall lay a [£]trap for you.
No one is aware of it.
- 8 “Will I not in that day,” says the LORD,
“Even destroy the wise *men* from Edom,
And understanding from the mountains of Esau?
- 9 Then your mighty men, O Teman, shall be dismayed,
To the end that everyone from the mountains of Esau
May be cut off by slaughter.
- 10 “For violence against your brother Jacob,
Shame shall cover you,
And you shall be cut off forever.
- 11 In the day that you stood on the other side—
In the day that strangers carried captive his forces,
When foreigners entered his gates
And cast lots for Jerusalem—
Even you *were* as one of them.
- 12 “But you should not have gazed on the day of your brother
[£]In the day of his captivity;
Nor should you have rejoiced over the children of Judah
In the day of their destruction;
Nor should you have spoken proudly
In the day of distress.
- 13 You should not have entered the gate of My people
In the day of their calamity.
Indeed, you should not have gazed on their affliction
In the day of their calamity,
Nor laid *hands* on their substance
In the day of their calamity.
- 14 You should not have stood at the crossroads
To cut off those among them who escaped;
Nor should you have delivered up those among them who remained
In the day of distress.
- 15 “For the day of the LORD upon all the nations *is* near;
As you have done, it shall be done to you;
Your reprisal shall return upon your own head.

- 16 For as you drank on My holy mountain,
So shall all the nations drink continually;
Yes, they shall drink, and swallow,
And they shall be as though they had never been.
- 17 “But on Mount Zion there shall be deliverance,
And there shall be holiness;
The house of Jacob shall possess their possessions.
- 18 The house of Jacob shall be a fire,
And the house of Joseph a flame;
But the house of Esau *shall be* stubble;
They shall kindle them and devour them,
And no survivor shall *remain* of the house of Esau,”
For the LORD has spoken.
- 19 The [Ⓢ]South shall possess the mountains of Esau,
And the Lowland shall possess Philistia.
They shall possess the fields of Ephraim
And the fields of Samaria.
Benjamin *shall possess* Gilead.
- 20 And the captives of this host of the children of Israel
Shall possess the land of the Canaanites
As far as Zarephath.
The captives of Jerusalem who are in Sepharad
Shall possess the cities of the [Ⓢ]South.
- 21 Then saviors[Ⓢ] shall come to Mount Zion
To judge the mountains of Esau,
And the kingdom shall be the LORD’S. (Obadiah 1:1-21. NKJV)

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

This IS the Word of the Lord which means that it is God-breathed and PROFITABLE for us this morning, but in order for it to be profitable we need to first answer a few questions because most of us are coming at this book for the very first time. The first question we need to ask is:

Question 1: Who are the Edomites?

The Edomites were a group of people who were descended from Esau, the brother of Jacob. They were thus related to the Jewish people but there was frequent warfare between the two groups. Their territory was to the south and east of Israel, below the Red Sea. (See map below)



The Edomites controlled a very important trade route called “The King’s Highway” that ran right through their territory. Most of you are actually familiar with one very famous Edomite city, the city of Petra which featured prominently in the Indiana Jones’ movie The Last Crusade. That city in the crescent canyon is the city of Petra.



Now many of the architectural features that were highlighted in the movie were actually added by the Nabateans who took it over from the Edomites, but it was in Bible times, a very important city of Edom and it showcased their engineering skill and their relative security which they were famous for. The Edomites were rich, they were successful merchants, they were respected engineers and they very strategically positioned in the Ancient world.

Question 2: What did they do wrong?

The answer to that question is found in verses 10-11:

- ¹⁰ “For violence against your brother Jacob,
Shame shall cover you,
And you shall be cut off forever.
¹¹ In the day that you stood on the other side—
In the day that strangers carried captive his forces,
When foreigners entered his gates
And cast lots for Jerusalem—
Even you *were* as one of them. (NKJV)

In 587 B.C. the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and carried the Jews into captivity. It was a slaughter. They starved the Jews inside the city and completely choked off all supplies of food. Mothers were eating their own babies, it was so terrible. You read about this a few weeks ago in 2 Kings 25. Finally King Zedekiah tried to fight his way through the blockade and lead a group of survivors to freedom but he was defeated. The Bible says:

⁶So they took the king and brought him up to the king of Babylon at Riblah, and they pronounced judgment on him. ⁷Then they killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, put out the eyes of Zedekiah, bound him with bronze fetters, and took him to Babylon. (2 Kings 25:6-7. NKJV)

It was a horrible day and a historic low point in the life of God’s people. And on that day, his brother Edom stood aside. He did not come to Israel’s aid. Not only that, he participated in the looting of Jerusalem. There is nothing more despicable than a looter. Can you imagine that if a band of armed robbers broke into your neighbour’s house and dragged your neighbour onto his front lawn and murdered his children and then slit his throat, can you imagine waiting for the robbers to leave and then sneaking into his house and looting it? That is what the Edomites did. Not only that, the Bible says that when some survivors were trying to run away down the King’s

Highway, the Edomites arrested them and handed them over to the Babylonians. That's in verse 14:

¹⁴ You should not have stood at the crossroads
To cut off those among them who escaped;
Nor should you have delivered up those among them who remained
In the day of distress. (NKJV)

Can you imagine that? That is like you finding a kid hiding under a pile of laundry while you are looting your neighbour's house and calling up the robbers to let them know they missed one. That is despicable and that is what the Edomites did to their brother Israel. They despised God's people and they treated them shamefully.

Question 3: How did God punish them?

We find that right away in verse 2:

² "Behold, I will make you small among the nations;
You shall be greatly despised. (NKJV)

God says: "I will shrink you, I will decimate you and I will make you a curse and a by-word to the nations." And that is what happened. Edom fell from the heights he had attained. Archaeologists tells us that around that time Edom began to shrink. Edom began to actually abandon some of his towns because they were not strong enough to hold them. The Arabs began biting off pieces of their territory and the Edomites had to migrate into southern Judah were over time they shrank and shrank and were eventually largely absorbed by the Arabs on one side and the Jews on the other. The Edomites in Judah became known as Idumeans – they were half Jew, half Edomite. Eventually they disappear from history all together. They were decimated and diminished by the Word of God and the justice of his judgement.

Well that is a fascinating story, but it did happen 2500 years ago; so why do we read it still? We are not Edomites in here, Edom hasn't even existed for 2 millennia, so why do we still bother to preserve this story in Holy Scripture? The reason this Scripture is profitable to us today is because it reveals to us the character of God. God doesn't change. If you want to know God you have to study how he has acted in different situations in the past. You identify traits and patterns

and you note those things very well because God doesn't learn, he doesn't grow, he does not mature, he does not modify – GOD DOES NOT CHANGE. Now Evangelicals need to be careful today because in the last 30 years or so we have started talking as though he does change. We've started saying very dangerous things like: "Well that may have been true of God in the Old Testament but now, under Jesus, God isn't like that anymore." That my friends, is good old fashioned heresy. Jesus does not represent a new management structure in the God-head – it is not as though back when the Father was in charge, things could get pretty nasty, but now that the Son is in charge, things have lightened up. God hasn't changed. Jesus said, to know me is to know the Father. There is no difference in essence or character between the Father and the Son. But you say, "well how come then in the Old Testament if a person or a nation sinned against God he would wipe them out but now he is all merciful and forgiving?" But that question is deeply flawed because it suggests that God did not show mercy in the Old Testament and that he does not show justice in the New Testament, but neither of those things is true. If anything the justice of God is more severe in the New Testament. When Sodom and Gomorrah persisted in sin in the Old Testament they got fire and brimstone rained on them; in the New Testament if people persist in sin its not like they get flowers and candy rained on them; on the contrary the Bible says that on the day of judgement:

anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:15. NKJV)

There is no difference. God is God. He is merciful AND just, in the Old Testament and New. God does not change. So we read these stories to understand an unchanging God. We want to understand his character and his work with respect to salvation and judgment. With this in mind I want you to notice three enduring principles from this story about God as recorded in Obadiah.

Enduring Principles From Obadiah

The first principle we want to notice is that:

i. God always provides a way of escape; there is safety in Zion

Look at verse 17, the prophet is talking about the Day of The Lord which will be judgment upon all the nations and he says:

¹⁷ “But on Mount Zion there shall be deliverance (NKJV)

When the Day of Wrath comes, the prophet says, you want to be found on Mount Zion. Mount Zion is an important concept to understand in the Bible. There is a sense in which it is a physical place – there are hills around Jerusalem which are physically Mount Zion, but Zion had become more than a place it had become a concept. Zion meant the people of God, wherever they are, Zion meant “safe within the covenant”, Zion meant “God’s Holy Dwelling Place”. In Hebrews 12 we see it used just this way, you read this last week:

²²But **you have come to Mount Zion** and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, ²³to the general assembly and church of the firstborn *who are* registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, ²⁴to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than *that of* Abel. (Hebrews 12:22-24. NKJV)

The people those words were written to were not physically in Israel – they were in Rome but the Apostle is telling them that even in Rome they are in Mount Zion because they have come to Christ! They are part of the congregation of the first born, registered in heaven! To be in Zion is to be safe in the covenant with God! The point is, my friend, that God always has an ark on the day of wrath. God always provides a way of escape. God is always merciful even in the Day of His Wrath. No one has to face God’s wrath. Noah invited everyone to come on board the ark and so flee the wrath to come. John the Baptist said: “Repent! Flee the wrath to come!” The Apostle Paul said that Jesus is our ark, Jesus is our road to Mount Zion, and he called on people to put their faith in this Jesus:

Jesus **who delivers us from the wrath to come.** (1 Thessalonians 1:10. NKJV)

If you put your faith in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour than God will deliver you and shelter you from the wrath to come. That doesn’t mean you won’t get wet, but it does mean you will not perish in the flood. God will see you safe to Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem that is to come.

ii. God uses the covenant community to divide and reveal

Look at verse 16:

¹⁶ For as you drank on My holy mountain,
So shall all the nations drink continually;
Yes, they shall drink, and swallow,
And they shall be as though they had never been. (NKJV)

God says that Edom celebrated the death of God's people on God's holy mountain – they drank a toast - and SO SHALL THE NATIONS DRINK CONTINUALLY. Yes, they shall drink and then I shall judge and it shall be as if they never existed. Here is what God is saying, he is saying that his people will always attract the animosity of his enemies and therefore, wherever you find people rejoicing in the death of God's people, there you also find people deserving of God's wrath. This theme is all throughout the Bible and gets picked up dramatically in Revelation 11:

⁷When they finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them. ⁸And their dead bodies *will lie* in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also [£]our Lord was crucified. ⁹Then *those* from the peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations [£]will see their dead bodies three-and-a-half days, and not allow their dead bodies to be put into graves. ¹⁰And **those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them, make merry, and send gifts to one another**, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth.

¹¹Now after the three-and-a-half days the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. ¹²And [£]they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." And they ascended to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies saw them. ¹³In the same hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. In the earthquake seven thousand people were killed, and the rest were afraid and gave glory to the God of heaven.

¹⁴The second woe is past. Behold, the third woe is coming quickly. (Revelation 11:7-14. NKJV)

Same story. God uses the covenant community to divide all humanity into two groups: those who belong to God and those who HATE God. In Revelation the whole book is about how God divides all humanity into those two camps; the camp of the lamb and the camp of the beast. By the end of the book everyone has the mark of the lamb and has attracted the hatred of the beast, or they have the mark of the beast and have attracted the wrath of the lamb. Here is what you need to understand my friends, God uses the covenant community as a litmus test and a wedge that divides all people into one of those two camps. We are bait for the enemies of God. In Revelation 12; do you remember the dream the Apostle had about the dragon who wants to eat all the children of the woman? This is a picture of church history, the Apostle says:

¹⁷And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus [£]Christ. (Revelation 12:17. NKJV)

The devil wants to kill all the children of Mother church and God doesn't respond to that by rapturing all those children directly up into heaven, rather he turns that hatred to serve his own purposes. He leaves the children on the earth to attract and identify all those who have aligned themselves with the devil in rebellion against God. The church serves the purpose of gathering God's enemies into one place where they can face his wrath. The church serves to clearly divide people into two camps: God's children and God's enemies. That's what the Bible says.

Now you might ask, "What should I do to partner with that plan?" The answer is "Nothing!" You don't have to wander around trying to irritate people or to divide people, you are irritating and divisive all on your own. Saved people are by nature of being saved people simultaneously inviting and irritating. That's what the Bible says. The Apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians:

¹⁶To the one *we are* the aroma of death *leading* to death, and to the other the aroma of life *leading* to life. (2 Corinthians 2:16. NKJV)

If we just live as truly saved people, Paul says, we are going to lead some to life and some to death – without trying to do that, we are going to do that. It is just going to happen. People are going to react to us just as they reacted to Jesus. Jesus said that this is how it would go:

¹⁹And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. ²⁰For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. ²¹But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God." (John 3:19-21. NKJV)

As it was with Jesus, so it is with us. Jesus said that the way people respond to his people, his covenant brothers, would reveal whether they were saved or whether they were deserving of wrath. You've heard me quote many times from the parable of the sheep and the goats. Those who were determined as sheep were determined as such because of the love they showed:

to one of the least of these **My brethren.** (Matthew 25:40. NKJV)

If people love God's people they show themselves to be God's people. Jesus said that if people listen to God's people, they show themselves to be God's people:

¹⁴And whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet. ¹⁵Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city! (Matthew 10:14-15. NKJV)

God uses his people to extend invitation and irritation simultaneously. God uses the covenant community to divide and to reveal. Thirdly and lastly we see that:

iii. God vindicates and restores his people

If we left this part of the story out God would seem unloving to his own people. It would seem that God uses us as bait to attract his enemies and then leaves us all chewed up and devastated but that isn't what happens at the end of the day. God knows that death is not the end, for God's people death is a doorway into the blessings of eternity. Revelation 11 reminds us that God's people die but then they are raised up and called up into all the blessings of eternal life. In the Old Testament and the New God reveals himself as the vindicator and rewarder of his people. Look at Obadiah 1:17 again:

¹⁷ “But on Mount Zion there shall be deliverance,
And there shall be holiness;
The house of Jacob shall possess their possessions. (NKJV)

All the children of Jacob – all of true Israel will possess all that was promised to them by God. Not one bit will be missing. In fact if you read Obadiah carefully you see that God is actually promising to restore to them more than they lost. He says in verse 20 that they will possess as far as Sepharad, which is a town up near Tyre and Sidon – that was never part of the promised land, it is actually north of the border – this is God's way of saying “I will restore to you all that you lost, all that was promised AND THEN SOME!” Jesus said that too:

²⁹And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother [£]or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life. (Matthew 19:29. NKJV)

My Christian friends, the truth is there are hard days ahead for us. In North America we have lived for 200 years inside a historical and geographical anomaly. We have been the only generation of Christians to have ever controlled a culture and to have founded a nation but now we are returning rapidly to the normal state of affairs. We are becoming a despised minority

within a largely antagonistic culture. Many of us are frightened. Some of us are angry. Well put away your anger because this was prophesied by Almighty God.

¹⁶You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends; and they will put *some* of you to death. ¹⁷And **you will be hated by all for My name's sake.** ¹⁸But not a hair of your head shall be lost. ¹⁹By your patience possess your souls. (Luke 21:16-19. NKJV)

There are hard days ahead. But beyond that, glorious days indeed. God will vindicate your faith. God will restore to you all that was lost and more beyond your imaginings. God will do it because God has said it and his word does not fail. This is who God is and he does not change.

How Then Shall We Live?

If this is who God is and God hasn't changed how then shall we live? Let me suggest we live this way:

1. With dignity

Now is not the time to forget WHOSE YOU ARE:

¹Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of ^gGod! Therefore the world does not know ^hus, because it did not know Him. ²Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. (1 John 3:1-2. NKJV)

You are a child of the coming king; conduct yourself accordingly.

2. With perseverance

¹⁹By your patience possess your souls. (Luke 21:19. NKJV)

The ESV renders that “By your **endurance** you will gain your lives”. Either one is fine. The Bible is calling on you to PERSEVERE. Things are going to get rough. Hang in there. Don't quit. Don't go hide in your Rapture Bunker. Don't abandon the faith because we are not the most popular kids in school anymore. Persevere my friends. By your patience possess your souls.

3. With overflowing mercy

The Apostle Paul put it this way:

let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith. (Galatians 6:10. NKJV)

If the Book of Obadiah teaches you nothing else it ought to have taught you that how you treat the covenant people of God will have massive and eternal consequences for your soul. It is a wise thing, a prudent thing and an obedient thing to go out of your way to be good to God's people. There is an angel tree in our church lobby. I am going to stand in this text and say if what this text says about God is true than that means that God has positioned some of his people in poverty to divide and reveal the rest of us into two camps. Those who love his people and those who do not. You may be poor this Christmas for no other reason than that God wants to give someone else in this church the opportunity to demonstrate that they are truly saved. Make sure your overflowing mercy is evident to all, but most of all make sure it is evident to Jesus. His eye is on the least of these his brethren. The day of the Lord is near and as you have done to these, so shall it be done to you. This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.