

The Day of the Lord Is Near

Obadiah 15-21

The Day of the Lord is near; let us serve Him with godly fear.

What is God's answer to human atrocities? How will the Maker of Heaven and Earth, the Just Judge of all, respond to murderers and massacres? In Isaiah 61:2 the prophet wrote, **"To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn . . ."** Stop to carefully consider this phrase: **"the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn."**

How can God bring forth His righteous vengeance and comfort all that mourn? These don't seem to fit together. But the Most High God still reigns; the kingdom is the Lord's, and the Lord will comfort His people. This afternoon, February 23, 2020 at 3 p.m. Central Time at the Southlawn Cemetery in South Bend, Indiana, 2,411 babies will be laid to rest. They were the victims of an abortion doctor named Dr. Ulrich Klopfer. When he died, his horrified family found boxes and boxes of fetal remains in his garage, and even in the trunk of his car. What is God's answer for these atrocities? How will He make these wrongs right? Obadiah gives us answers. The Book of Obadiah was probably written about the time of the Babylonian invasion (587-586 B.C.). We have no indication that this prophecy was ever heard in Edom (as Jonah's prophecy was in Nineveh). But Obadiah's prophecy was meant to comfort those who were ravaged at Jerusalem. That comfort is especially clear in these last verses of Obadiah. It is God's answer to the atrocities committed at Jerusalem and throughout history. For the same Lord who came as the Savior of the world, will come to judge the world in righteousness.

The Coming Day of the Lord is Near: The Day(s) of the Lord (Many Days or One Day?) 15

¹⁵ For the day of the LORD is near upon all the heathen [nations]: as thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee: thy reward shall return upon thine own head.

What is meant by "the day of the Lord is near?" The Day of the Lord is a period of time in which Lord openly and obviously intervenes in human affairs. He does so in a manner that even unbelievers are aware that He is at work. The Day of the Lord is different from Divine Providence, which is the mysterious or hidden work of God. Obadiah 8 declares a day of the Lord to judge Edom. Verse 15 describes a Day of the Lord upon all the nations. Can the day described in verse 8 be placed within the day described in verse 15? It is possible. But there is no mention of Judah in verse 8, and no mention of Edom in verse 15. There are other references to the Day of the Lord in the Old Testament that cannot be easily placed in verse 15. This is because they refer to judgments that occurred in the past. For instance, in Lamentations 2:22, Jeremiah referred to Jerusalem's destruction (by the Babylonians) as "the day of the Lord's anger." He described the Babylonian defeat of Egypt at the battle of Carcemish, as the Day of the Lord God of hosts (Jeremiah 46:1-10). (See also, Ezekiel 30.) So, is the Day of the Lord a coming day in Biblical prophecy? Or has there been more than one Day of the Lord leading to an ultimate Day of the Lord to come?

Michael Barrett wrote, "Throughout Old Testament history, there were multiple Days of the Lord (against Edom, Babylon, Egypt, and Israel; i.e., the locust plague in Joel, etc.). These often include the themes of judgment on the wicked, deliverance for the righteous, the coming of Messiah, and the triumph of God over all. Each of these historic days points to the one coming eschatological day that will mark the end of time as we know it now: the final day of reckoning, an unmistakable revelation of God's justice."ⁱ But Mark Hassler "contends that Obadiah's entire vision awaits a distant eschatological [last days]

fulfillment.”ⁱⁱ In other words, he believes there is only one Day of the Lord in Scripture. In his thinking, all the references to the Day of the Lord can be brought together to describe one Day of the Lord at the end of the ages. Robert Bell has suggested a way to reconcile these different viewpoints. He writes that each episode identified as a “Day of the Lord” may be a type, and the ultimate Day of the Lord is the antitype. What he means is that each historic episode is a type or symbol that foreshadows the final, terrible Day of the Lord upon all nations.ⁱⁱⁱ Scholars on both sides of the issue could agree on this.

But what does all this mean to us? Whether there is only one Day of the Lord or many, this much is clear: it is *near*. Those days of the Lord that seem to have already occurred teach us this lesson. Just as God directly intervened in human history (at Jerusalem, at Carcemish, etc.), He has promised to do so again. The ultimate Day of the Lord is near. This nearness causes every one of us to look carefully at his or her own manner of life. We should conduct our lives in the fear of the Lord, for the Day of the Lord is near. The same Lord who came to be our Savior, will come to judge the world in righteousness.

The Coming Day of the Lord is for All Nations, 15

The Day of the Lord is near upon all nations. This prophecy to Edom is an example to all the nations. When the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem, the Edomites joyfully looted the land of their brothers (v.13). Edom consumed the precious things of Jerusalem. Other nations had done the same. For instance, Joel 3:4-7 records that Tyre, Sidon and the Philistines rose up against Jerusalem; they sold Jewish people as slaves to Greece. (This may have been during the Babylonian invasion, but it is uncertain.) They will be repaid by the Lord in the Day of the Lord (see v. 19).

The Day of the Lord upon Edom should be a warning about the Day of the Lord upon all nations. According to Encyclopedia Britannica, “*Edom prospered because of its strategic location on the trade route between Arabia and the Mediterranean and its copper industry at Ezion-geber. Edom and Moab were later conquered by the Nabataeans, and the Edomites migrated to southern Judaea, where they were known in New Testament times as Idumaeans.*”^{iv} Their nation was destroyed, and the coming Day of the Lord is upon all nations.

The Coming Day of the Lord is about Appropriate Justice (Sowing and Reaping) 15b-16

The Lord promised the nations, “**as thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee: thy reward shall return upon thine own head**” (15b). This warning should cause every single person to look at his or her life in the light of the Lord’s coming. Every nation must be made aware that the Lord will reward it for its violence, deceit and betrayal. As you have done, so it shall be done to you Even our most covert operations are not hidden from the Lord’s eyes. The Day of the Lord is near. This is God’s response to the proud question in Obadiah 3: “Who will bring me to the ground?” The Lord’s response is in verse 4: “I will bring you down, says the Lord.” What we are watching the news about the spread of the coronavirus around the world, and especially in China. On the same day that President Xi Jinping declared, “Our progress will not be halted by any storms and tempests,” he made no reference to the virus that had already taken hold of the country.^v But today, we read that China is in serious economic trouble, and it is likely that this trouble will cause economic problems around the world.^{vi} The headlines read, “Millions of Chinese Firms Face Collapse If Banks Don’t Act Fast”. Reflecting the principle in verse 15, the Apostle Paul wrote in Galatians 6:7, “**Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for ^wwhatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.**”

With this principle in mind, think carefully about what Jesus taught us Matthew 7:12 (“the Golden Rule”). **“Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.”** We may be seeing this principle of sowing and reaping happening before our very eyes in the news. Recently, three credible news organizations have raised the question about the origins of the coronavirus. Yesterday, the New York Post put it this way: *“Don’t buy China’s story: The coronavirus may have leaked from a lab.”*^{vii} This news story denies that the coronavirus could have begun in an open-air market selling bats and snakes, which is the common story. Several sources point to the Wuhan Institute of Virology, which conducts research in bioweapons, as the source of this virus. If – and it’s still an “if” – the story is true, then this principle from Obadiah would apply: **“as you have done, so it shall be done to you.”**

Take Edom for an example in verse 16: **“For as ye have drunk upon my holy mountain, so shall all the heathen drink continually, yea, they shall drink, and they shall swallow down, and they shall be as though they had not been.”**

Those who destroyed Jerusalem applauded with pagan revelry and drunken rejoicing. Attacks on the Jewish people are still greeted with revelry. Today Anti-Semitism is on the rise, and modern nations should be warned. In France in 2018, anti-Semitic acts rose by nearly 75 percent. "A third of all the French Jews who’ve emigrated to Israel since its establishment in 1948 have done so in the last 10 years, according to data from the Jewish Agency, which facilitates Jewish immigration to Israel."^{viii} Jerusalem’s destroyers rejoiced, but their day will come: the Day of the Lord. Edom ceased to exist as a nation when its major cities were destroyed and looted. The Nabateans took control of this area (which is now in the nation of Jordan). Apparently some Edomites survived the destruction of their nation. Members of the **“house of Esau”** (v. 18) migrated into southern Judea. This is reflected in the Greek word “Idumea,” describing the region. For instance, some of the crowd that followed Jesus in Galilee (Mark 3:8) were Idumean. From history, we know that Herod the Great was the son of Antipater a “wily Idumean.”^{ix} It was this Herod who slaughtered the babies of Bethlehem when the wise men sought “the King of the Jews.” The “perpetual hatred” (Ezekiel 35:3-5) of the Edomites continued even there. God destroyed Edom as a nation. But God promised that in the ultimate Day of the Lord’s vengeance, it shall be as though there had never been an Edomite nation.

The Coming Day of the Lord is about the Deliverance of Israel 17-21

The contrast in Obadiah is between the destruction on Mount Esau (v. 9) and the deliverance on Mount Zion (v. 17). In the coming Day of the Lord “the house of Jacob” will utterly destroy “the house of Esau” (v.18). Yes, the nations have committed wicked violence, but the Lord will take vengeance on them with holiness in His deliverance of His people: **17 But upon mount Zion shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness; and the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions.**

Mount Zion is the City of David (2 Samuel 5:7), on the southeast corner of the old city of Jerusalem. Recent archeological discoveries have verified its location. Deliverance came to Zion, but not in the way that the people expected. Zechariah 9:9 prophesied, **“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: He is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon a donkey, and upon a colt the foal of a donkey.”** This prophecy was fulfilled in Matthew 21:6-11: the “Triumphal Entry” that we celebrate on Palm Sunday before Resurrection Sunday. And therein is the story of real deliverance. Jesus came to save His people from their sins (Matthew 1:21). By His death for our sins, and rising again, He brought deliverance on mount Zion. The mount of Zion was profaned and trampled upon through many invasions. But the Day of the Lord is coming in which the

mount of Zion will be holy. (See Psalm 14:7, Isaiah 52:7). And there will be deliverance. How will the Lord accomplish this in the Day of the Lord? How will He restore the possessions of Jacob?

¹⁸ And the house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau for stubble, and they shall kindle in them, and devour them; and there shall not be any remaining of the house of Esau; for the LORD hath spoken it.

The Lord will use the nation of Israel to defeat these enemies. How will this take place? The same Lord who came to be our Savior, will come to judge the world in righteousness. Zechariah 12:8 describes it this way: **“In that day shall the LORD defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; And he that is feeble among them at that day shall be as David . . .”** They shall be as a fire, and their enemies as stubble.

¹⁹ And they of the south shall possess the mount of Esau; and they of the plain the Philistines: and they shall possess the fields of Ephraim, and the fields of Samaria: and Benjamin shall possess Gilead. ²⁰ And the captivity of this host of the children of Israel shall possess that of the Canaanites, even unto Zarephath; and the captivity of Jerusalem, which is in Sepharad, shall possess the cities of the south. Thomas Constable explains, “Obadiah predicted that Jews living in various parts of Israel would possess parts of the Promised Land that other nations formerly occupied (cf. Isaiah 66:8; Zechariah 12:10 to Zechariah 13:1; Zechariah 14:1-9). These parts included Mt. Seir (Edom), Philistia, and territories to the north of Judah, including Ephraim and Samaria (the Northern Kingdom), and Transjordan (Gilead). Formerly exiled Israelites living to the north near Zarephath (in modern Lebanon) and in Sepharad (perhaps Sardis in modern Turkey or a territory in Media or Spain”^x (Others think that “Sepharad” refers to the Jewish people who have been dispersed all over the world.)

²¹ And saviors shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be the LORD’S. The same Lord who raised up judges whom He enabled (as in the Book of Judges) will do so again. “And the feeble among them shall be as David” (Zechariah 12:8). He will do so because “the kingdom shall be the Lord’s. Our God is sovereign; He still reigns in the affairs of men.

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ⁱ Michael P.V. Barrett, “The Message of Obadiah: It’s Going to Be Okay,” Puritan Reformed Journal, PRJ 05:2 (Jul 2013), 18

ⁱⁱ Mark Hassler, The Setting Of Obadiah: When Does The Oracle Concerning Edom Transpire? JETS, JETS 59:2 (Jun 2016), 246

ⁱⁱⁱ Robert D. Bell, The Theological Messages of the Old Testament Books, Greenville: Bob Jones University Press, 2010, 378

^{iv} (“Edom,” Encyclopedia Britannica, 2016-09-17T01:41:18Z)

^v Chris Buckley and Steven Myers, Where’s Xi? China’s Leader Commands Coronavirus Fight From Safe Heights, NY Times, February 15, 2020 <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/08/world/asia/xi-coronavirus-china.html>

^{vi} <https://www.bloombergquint.com/global-economics/millions-of-chinese-firms-face-collapse-if-banks-don-t-act-fast>

^{vii} Steven W. Mosher, “Don’t buy China’s story: The coronavirus may have leaked from a lab,” New York Post, February 22, 2020 accessed at <https://nypost.com/2020/02/22/dont-buy-chinas-story-the-coronavirus-may-have-leaked-from-a-lab/>

^{viii} National Geographic, “Things have only gotten worse”: French Jews are fleeing their country: Facing record levels of anti-Semitism, members of Europe’s largest Jewish population seek a new life in Israel—and face new challenges. Thursday, 21 November 2019

^{ix} M. G. Easton, “Herod the Great” *Easton’s Bible Dictionary* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1893).

^x Thomas Constable, Commentary on Obadiah, StudyLight.org <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/dcc/obadiah-1.html>