



**BETHEL**  
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## **MINISTRY OF THE WORD**

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### Exposé of Sin

Moses is one of most well-known Bible characters. Movies have been made about him. Plays have been done on his life. In fact, if a non-Christian is going to be familiar with any part of the Bible it most likely will include the story of Moses. And all of this is for good reason. He was chosen from the womb to lead God's people out of bondage, Exodus 2:1; 3:1. He performed incredible miracles, Exodus 4. He went to the most powerful man in his day and requested the release of the people of God, Exodus 5. He spoke with God as no other man had, Exodus 19; Numbers 12:6-8. He was willing to be accursed for the people of God, Exodus 32:32! He is described as "the servant of God" (Daniel 9:11), "the humblest man in the world" (Numbers 12:3), and "a prophet of God" (Exodus 19-20)

Yet, this great man was also a sinner. God told Moses while he and the nation were in the wilderness in need of water to speak to the rock.

Numbers 20:8-12: “‘Take the rod; and you and your brother Aaron assemble the congregation and speak to the rock before their eyes, that it may yield its water. You shall thus bring forth water for them out of the rock and let the congregation and their beasts drink.’ So Moses took the rod from before the Lord, just as He had commanded him; and Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly before the rock. And he said to them, ‘Listen now, you rebels; shall we bring forth water for you out of this rock?’ Then Moses lifted up his hand and STRUCK the rock twice with his rod; and water came forth abundantly, and the congregation and their beasts drank. But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, ‘Because you have not believed Me, to treat Me as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.’”

Talk about shocking! Moses’ rebellion against God cost him the earthly Promised Land. Because of his sin, Moses was not permitted to lead God’s people into this land; he could only see it from afar (Numbers 27:12-14)!

From this incident in the life of Moses, we learn that there is no such thing as an *innocent* sin! Every sin is serious. William Secker wrote:

There is more real evil in a particle of corruption than in an ocean of tribulation! The evil of suffering is transient, but the evil of sin is permanent. The consistent Christian will always choose the worst of sorrows before he will commit the least of sins! The wicked entirely reverse this for they prefer the greatest sin to the least sufferings! (Secker, 2012 (1660 Facsimile))

Obadiah details the ravishing effects of sin on the nation of Edom! Recall, when God’s people went into exile in 586 BC, the nation of Edom came out in droves to watch. It didn’t take long before their *watching* turned into *mocking* which soon turned into *participating* in the destruction of Jerusalem! Great indeed was their sin (recall Obadiah 11-15)! And great indeed would be the cost!

Now, at the writing of this prophecy no doubt many of God’s people reflected upon the treachery of Edom with anger, bitterness, and resentment (we see it in v. 12). Yet that is NOT how God would have His people live on this earth, much less in exile! Accordingly, our section was written to:

- Open the eyes of God’s people that they might see Edom for what the nation truly was, as well as...
- Warn God’s people of sin!

We are given an exposé of sin and its present restraint in the world.

Obadiah 5a, "If thieves came to you, if robbers by night- O how you will be ruined!- would they not steal *only* until they had enough?..."

This present state of sin and misery is made "live-able" on account of the preserving grace of God which clearly is in view here. When it comes to "a thief" or "a robber" who sneaks into a house at night the objective is NOT to devastate the family, BUT simply to acquire that which is desired.<sup>1</sup> In this regard there is a sense of restraint as the robbers could just as easily rape, pillage, and burn the house. It is this restraint that is the focus of this verse!

And so when robbers come by night and steal, typically they only steal what is desired. They don't leave a family devastated even though they could! And why is that? Well, notice further:

Obadiah 5b, "...If grape gatherers came to you, would they not leave *some* gleanings?"

This was the practice in the ancient world amongst the Jews and those influenced by God's word. According to Deuteronomy 24:21, fruit pickers were to "leave some gleanings" so that the poor and disadvantaged might have something to eat, lest they starve.

Now inasmuch as the harvesting of grapes was according to the grace of God given to preserve the land, on account of the parallelism here we conclude that, so it is with thieves and robbers. What they do or don't do is according to the preserving grace of God! From this we conclude that it is the grace of God that upholds this world- restraining the motives and desires of sinful man- that it might be live-able for His people. That is why this world is NOT as bad as it possibly could be!

Recall the parable of the wheat and the tares. When a wealthy land owner discovered that an enemy sabotaged his field by sowing tares amidst the wheat this is what he said.

Matthew 13:28b-30a: "...the slaves said to him, 'Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?' But he said, 'No; lest while you are gathering up the tares, you may root up the wheat with them. Allow both to grow together until the harvest...'"

This is a very illuminating parable. When the land owner watered the field, was it his intention to help the tares? Absolutely not! When he fertilized the field, for which plant was the nutrition intended? The Wheat! Yet both the wheat and the tares received the provisions. Why? Because to root out the tares would damage the wheat. Accordingly, grace was given to all that the desirable plant might be preserved- which in this case is God's people! It is as God said in...

Matthew 5:45b, "...God causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."

Why is that? Because God cares for the wicked and righteous alike? Absolutely not! It is

because God loves His people! In theology this is known as The Redemptive Principle... God is good to all that salvation (justification, sanctification, glorification) might come to some!

It is this *common* grace that is the focus of this verse. When it comes to the wickedness of man, God restrains their sin. That is the *common* mode of God and so what we understand and expect in the world in which we live. Practically speaking let us learn from this passage, let us never forget that the sin we commit in this world is accompanied by the preserving grace of God.

There are times in our lives where in our weakness we willingly sin because, quite frankly, it is enjoyable. We might even be heard saying or thinking, "What's the harm? So long as two people love each other, does their gender really matter?"

How we must understand! The smallest sin has the potential to destroy a world! Thomas Brooks put it this way:

One sin stripped the fallen angels of all their glory! One sin stripped our first parents of all their dignity and excellency! One fly in the box of precious ointment, spoils the whole box. One thief may rob a man of all his treasure. One disease may deprive a man of all his health. One strong wind may blow down and blow away all a man's comforts. Just so, one sin delighted and wallowed in, will make a man miserable forever!... It was a sore vexation to King Lysimachus, that he lost his earthly kingdom for one drink of water. O sirs! it will be an everlasting vexation to such, who for one lust shall at last lose not an earthly kingdom, but a heavenly kingdom! (Brooks, 2013 (1669 facsimile))

Truly, the smallest sin has the potential to destroy the world. The fact that it does not immediately destroy the world is on account of the preserving grace of God!

Romans 2:4, "...do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?"

Again, the only reason sin is enjoyable in this present state is because God is withholding much of its consequences. Therefore, to look lightly upon sin is to think lightly of "the riches of His kindness, forbearance, and patience!" Without these graces, we would know the sting of sin, but we would die before we could be brought to repentance!

So the first thing we learn about sin is that in this age, God restrains it! The sinner is NOT left to be as sinful as he possibly could be. YET that is NOT to say in God's restraining grace, the sinner doesn't reap in this state a fuller measure of God's wrath on account of his sin. That clearly would be the case for the Edomites. Notice the end of their sin (and for that matter, all sin).

Obadiah 6, "O how Esau will be ransacked, and his hidden treasures searched out!"

The word for "ransacked," *חָפְסָה* (*hāpasá*), is a word in Hebrew for the diligent and thorough

searching for something. It is used of searching a house for plunder (1 Kings 20:6), of searching out the prophets of Baal (2 Kings 10:23), or Saul's search for David (1 Samuel 23:23). That which characterizes each of these examples is that of a thorough search which leaves nothing untouched or unturned.

That having been said, I want you to see that the focus here is somewhat otherworldly. For think of it, no matter how hard a conquering army might search for treasure in a city, there is no way they could get all of it. How many buried treasures would escape their notice? Yet the language here describes so thorough a judgment that nothing would be left undisturbed; every treasure hidden would be revealed!

Furthermore that "Esau" is here named (instead of Edom) speaks of *the people* of Edom and so references a day when not one of them or their deeds would remain hidden. All would be revealed! In fact, this would be their ruin.

Obadiah 5b, "...O how you will be ruined!"

This little phrase is an editorial interjection on the part of God/Obadiah in v. 5. While describing the effects of God's present restraint of evil, the reality of God's judgment against Edom could not be squelched! And so just as linguistically a reference to Edom's ultimate judgment broke out in the middle of the verse, so God's judgment would soon break out into this world and Edom would be devastated!<sup>2</sup>

The word for "ruined" here is דָּמָא (dāmā) which refers to the sudden and violent end of something.<sup>3</sup> The focus is on the violence of the end which here is in reference to the national demise of Edom. The nation soon would be conquered by an army that would violently swoop down upon the nation. Everyone and everything would be impacted! And yet, there is more.

Obadiah 18b, "...But the house of Esau *will be* as stubble. And they will set them on fire and consume them, so that there will be no survivor of the house of Esau."

Talk about vivid language. "Stubble"/"Chaff" references that which is easily and quickly consumed by fire (chaff is what is used to start a fire). And so, Edom as a nation because of its sin had become a highly flammable substance that needed only a spark for it to be consumed. That spark began in 586 BC. After Judah fell to the Babylonians, many an Edomite was taken into exile as well, yet the nation would remain. Then in the fifth century BC, the Nabatean Kingdom (Arabia) would conquer the territory of Edom. Many Edomites would perish, but there would be a remnant who would survive by moving to the wilderness south of Judah (known as the Negev). Here Edom would remain a very small people group until 70 AD.

At this time, when Israel rebelled against Rome, Edom would stand with their brethren in defiance against Rome (perhaps because of the consequence of not standing with them in 586 BC). Unfortunately, this was a battle Edom would have been wise to have avoided. For

when Jerusalem fell, the Edomites were completely wiped off the face of the earth — in fulfillment of the prophecy given here in Obadiah!

One must understand the significance of this judgment. We know and fully accept the reality that there is a Day of Judgment coming to this earth in which all will stand before Christ's judgment seat and be judged. Those who do not pass the judgment will be cast into the Lake of Fire where they will suffer under God's wrath for eternity. Yet what if God rendered this judgment before the time? What if God deigned to lift His grace upon certain ones in this world and so condemn them before the Last Judgment?

That is what God did with the nation of Edom which is announced in the text before us. Even though at the writing of Obadiah Edom still existed as a nation, nevertheless God told his people here that it was simply a matter of time before Edom would be completely destroyed! Isn't this how Christ taught us to view the tragedies of this life?

Luke 13:1-4, "Now on the same occasion there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And He answered and said to them, 'Do you suppose that these Galileans were *greater* sinners than all *other* Galileans, because they suffered this *fate*? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, were *worse* culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.'"

In this way Edom stands as a horrible example of The End of Sin and so that which awaits any and all outside of Christ. We read in Romans 6:23 that "... the wages of sin is death," but I think we rarely consider what this statement means. Once again, today sin is made lovely on account of the common grace of God which preserves the sinner from reaping in his person the full consequence of his sin. That means today sin brings with it primarily the joy of rebellion with little, if any, of its consequences. Yet it won't always be that way. The day is coming when each and every one of us will stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ. Those determined to be a "sheep" will be placed at God's right hand (Matthew 25:34-40) ultimately to be led to the pleasant pastures of the New Heavens and Earth. Those determined to be a "goat" will be placed at God's left hand (Matthew 25:41-46) ultimately to be thrown into the Lake of Fire where they will spend eternity suffering under the wrath of God in a place where sin is NOT restrained. J. L. Dagg describes it this way:

Devils, and wicked men, all under the same condemnation, will be their eternal companions: and the companionship, instead of affording relief, will be an aggravation of their woe. The whole throng, hateful, and hating one another, will be tormentors of one another. The malignant passions, which, on earth, caused wars, assassinations, cruelty, oppression, and every species of injury, will be let loose without restraint to banish peace and brotherhood forever from the infernal society; and the passions which burn in the hearts of wicked men on earth, and destroy all internal peace, and sometimes drive to suicide, will then be unrestrained, and do their full work of torture;

and relief by suicide, or self-annihilation, will be forever impossible. (J. L. Dagg, 1857, pp. Vol. 1-2, p. 368)

This shocking reality was Obadiah's intent in recording The End of Edom's Sin (vv. 5, 6, 18). For you see, Obadiah chose to express the downfall of Edom in the form of a dirge (vv. 5, 6)<sup>4</sup>- which, if you know anything about Hebrew poetry, a lamentation. In other words, God did NOT want His people living in exile in bitterness and anger at the memory of what Edom did at the time of Judah's hour of need (as Obadiah reflects in v. 12). Rather, God wanted His people to pity this nation and so to be moved to prayer for this and any nonbeliever! D. W. Barker wrote:

The writer uses the dirge form to drive his message home; his hearers join in mourning those who are already as good as dead. (T. Desmond Alexander, 2009, p. 37)

Think of it! Yes, Judah went into exile, but as a people they had a glorious future (cf. Jeremiah 29:11). The same could not be said when it came to Edom (or anyone who dies outside of Christ)! By virtue of the form of our text — the dirge — it is God's intention that His people be moved to grief, sorrow, pity, and so action.

It is as Asaph discovered so long ago. Psalm 73 begins with Asaph lamenting the easy plight of the wicked.

Psalms 73:3-9, "For I was envious of the arrogant, *as* I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no pains in their death; and their body is fat. They are not in trouble *as other* men; nor are they plagued like mankind. Therefore pride is their necklace; the garment of violence covers them. Their eye bulges from fatness; the imaginations of *their* heart run riot. They mock, and wickedly speak of oppression; they speak from on high. They have set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue parades through the earth."

In fact, Asaph is so moved in envy that he begins to regret his service of the Lord which seemed only to lead to suffering and want in this world (Psalms 73:13-14). Yet what is it that woke the psalmist from his regret and despair? The knowledge of "the wages of sin!"

Psalms 73: 16-19, "When I pondered to understand this, it was troublesome in my sight until I came into the sanctuary of God; *then* I perceived their end. Surely Thou dost set them in slippery places; Thou dost cast them down to destruction. How they are destroyed in a moment! They are utterly swept away by sudden terrors!"

This sounds like the fate that awaited Edom! And so today, on account of Common Grace, the wages of sin is restrained. Yet it won't always be that way. Accordingly, we who know the Lord and His word must NOT envy the wicked or be angered by them. Rather we must be moved to pity, prayer, and then action! In fact, consider with me the place where Obadiah is bringing us.

Obadiah 15-17a, “For the day of the Lord draws near on all the nations. As you have done, it will be done to you. Your dealings will return on your own head. Because just as you drank on My holy mountain, all the nations will drink continually. They will drink and swallow, and become as if they had never existed. But on Mount Zion there will be those who escape...”-

Mount Zion years before this saw Abraham offer his son, Isaac, as a sacrifice, yet God provided a “ram caught in a thicket.” Then 1800 years later another Father offered his Son on the same mountain, but this time no substitute was given. In fact, the Son was the substitute, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Well, it is as you, I, and this world flees to Mount Zion — Jesus Christ — we will know the peace and deliverance of Christ. We most certainly “will escape!” This is our consolation and joy. And this is the message and only hope for the worldling in Obadiah’s day as well as our own!

## References

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## End Note(s)

- <sup>1</sup> We are not talking here about armies conquering a city; their aim is indeed to wreak havoc on a population.
- <sup>2</sup> D. W. Baker wrote, “It fits the context as a spontaneous cry of heart-rending shock elicited by the devastation (cf. v. 6).” (*Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, TOTC, p. 36).
- <sup>3</sup> Cf. Is. 15:1; Jeremiah 47:5; Hos. 4:5–6; 10:15.
- <sup>4</sup> D. W. Baker wrote, “This lament, a form generally opened by how (’ēk), is used in dirges (cf. 2 Samuel 1:19; Isa. 14:4, 12; Jeremiah 9:19). It fits the context as a spontaneous cry of heart-rending shock elicited by the devastation (cf. v. 6). Another mark of a dirge is its metre or rhythm, which is in the pattern 3 + 2 for Hebrew (e.g. Amos 5:2–3a). Our oracle section begins and ends with this pattern.” (*Obadiah, Jonah and Micah: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC, pp. 36-37).