

ANCIENT WORDS FOR MODERN DISCIPLES

July 31, 2022 | *Enduring Shame, Trusting God (Obadiah)*

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

What counsel would you give someone who planned to exploit others in a time of weakness?

Read Obadiah.

Ask God to use Obadiah to help you understand the struggle of the people of God today.

THIS WEEK

KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

The victory of sinful nations will not last when God appears in judgment.

THEOLOGY APPLIED

Our hope must rest in the kingdom of God rather than the temporary victory of man.

MEDITATE

“Will I not on that day, declares the Lord, destroy the wise men out of Edom, and understanding out of Mount Esau? And your mighty men shall be dismayed, O Teman, so that every man from Mount Esau will be cut off by slaughter” (Obadiah 8–9).

GETTING STARTED

+This section introduces the book of Obadiah and establishes the needed connections between us and his audience that enables us to apply Obadiah’s message today.

Q: *Who was Esau? What was his relationship with the people of Judah?*

Q: *Why would the people of Edom have taken pleasure in Judah's suffering?*

If you read commentaries or Bible dictionary articles on Obadiah, you will quickly discover that most scholars admit we cannot be certain when this book was written. Unlike most of the other prophetic books, Obadiah did not identify the king under whose reign he prophesied. Although he referred to the actions of Edom against Judah, he did not provide enough detail for us to be certain when they took place. Even the name “Obadiah,” which means “servant or worshipper of Yahweh,” offers no help because several Obadiah's are mentioned in the Old Testament.

What we can be certain of is what the book tells us. The nation of Edom saw an opportunity to exploit the people of God at a time of weakness. Judah had been ransacked by a foreign power, and the Edomites saw an opportunity to antagonize them. The Edomites were descendants of Esau, Jacob's older brother. As was the pattern in Genesis, God chose the younger son of Isaac and Rebekah to be the focus of the covenant promises first made to Abraham (Genesis 25:19–34). Thus, the Old Testament follows the descendants of Jacob, who became the Israelites. Nevertheless, there was a kinship between the Edomites and the Israelites even though there was frequent hostility between them.

Although we cannot be certain when Obadiah was written, there are some indicators that the message of the book transcends a particular event. Whenever the events referred to occurred, it seems as though the author understood them to establish a pattern that would continue into the future and extend to other nations as well (Obadiah 15). The nations are hostile to the people of God. Thus, it is not the specific event or the dating of it that are important but the pattern it establishes.

Q: *What are some differences between the people of Israel, of whom Obadiah is a part, and the church and modern Christians?*

Q: *Why is it important to recognize the differences between Israel and the church when drawing applications from the Old Testament?*

APPLICATION POINT – In the Old Testament, the people of God were generally synonymous with the people of Israel. There were people from outside of Israel who believed in the God of Israel, but not many. And even though

many Israelites were not faithful, including many of the kings, Israel was still God's unique covenant people. In the new covenant, all believers in Christ become part of true Israel, Jews who confess faith in Christ, to form a new people of God (Ephesians 3:6). The church is like Israel in that it is comprised of the people of God who have a covenant relationship with Him, but it is different in that the people of God in the New Testament cannot be described in nationalistic terms. This will be important to remember as we identify and apply principles from Obadiah to our situation. Much of Obadiah concerns Edom's actions against the nation of Israel. To properly apply these principles to ourselves, we must recognize the importance of these principles for the church.

▣ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+Obadiah's purpose is to describe Edom's sin and God's response. In widening God's response to include all nations (Obadiah 15), the description of Edom's particular sin becomes a warning to all nations who oppose the people of God.

1. EDMOM'S SIN

2. 2. GOD'S RESPONSE

GOING DEEPER

+Obadiah highlights four elements of Edom's sin: They were prideful, showed no mercy, refused to stand up for their "brother," and were opportunistic. God's response is twofold. He will judge wicked nations, and He will establish His kingdom.

1. EDMOM'S SIN.

▣ OBADIAH 1-14

🔍 Verse 3 says, "The pride of your heart has deceived you." What were the Edomites prideful about?

🔍 Obadiah described Edom with terms indicating height, such as "lofty" and "soar." Why do you think he used this terminology?

Edom was located across the Jordan River and the Dead Sea from Judah. The terrain there is higher and more rugged, which made it harder for invading armies to control the area. It appears the Edomites found prideful satisfaction in being able to defend their territory. Their pride was stoked when they witnessed armies invading Judah. Thus, when Obadiah described the Edomites in “soaring” terms (Obadiah 3–4), there are literal and figurative elements to his words. The Edomites lived higher than the surrounding territory, and they also thought highly of themselves.

Although the Edomites took pride in their territory and its natural defenses, their pride deceived them. No matter how high their dwellings—even if they soared like an eagle or reached the stars—nothing is beyond the reach of the Lord. When the Lord determined to bring Edom down, their dwellings would amount to nothing more than anthills.

🕒: *What is pride? How is it deceptive?*

🕒: *What does pride reveal about our hearts?*

APPLICATION POINT – Pride is misplaced praise. Human beings are wired to praise. A prideful person directs his praise toward himself. Directing our praise inward distorts reality. The more we praise ourselves, the harder it becomes to find anything worthy of praise outside of us. The less we find worthy of praise outside of ourselves, the more we are offended when others do not share our admiration of ourselves. Pride also creates an inner trust that fails to correspond to reality. The Edomites believed their settlements could not be conquered even though they had been subjected to other nations before and would be again. We allow even minor successes to feed our egos until we are ready to redefine our lives by them because our pride deludes us into trusting ourselves. The only solution to pride is to rediscover the God who is worthy of our praise and allow Him to define us.

🕒: *Why did Obadiah mention thieves and grape gatherers?*

🕒: *Why would grape gatherers leave gleanings behind?*

In Obadiah 5–7, the prophet fantasized about the destruction of Edom but in a way that also condemned Edom’s actions. As will be discussed later, when the Edomites saw Judah in shambles, they made raids into the land to sweep up anything left. Obadiah condemned the Edomites for showing no mercy to Judah. Thieves only take what they can turn a profit on. Grape gatherers do not concern themselves with securing every last grape from the field.

But Edom lacked even the mercy of thieves and grape gatherers. When Edom raided Judah, they took everything they could get their hands on. They showed no mercy. That is what Obadiah foresaw for the Edomites.

🔗: *In what ways do Christians seek the mercy of the world?*

🔗: *How does seeking the mercy of the world make us abandon the mercy of God?*

APPLICATION POINT – The world is increasingly hostile to Christian beliefs. Biblical beliefs about life, salvation, sexuality, and even gender are seen as arcane and passé, and those who have no respect for God want Christians to fall in line. The temptation for Christians is to compromise their beliefs in an attempt to gain the mercy of the world. But Obadiah shows that the mercy of the world is cruel and short-lived. If believers compromise on one issue, before long they must compromise on another. Instead of seeking the world’s mercy, believers must endure the world’s anger and trust in God’s mercy. God’s mercy, unlike the world’s, is unconditional. It does not run out. It takes away sin rather than increasing it.

🔗: *Why would Obadiah believe Edom had an obligation to help in Judah’s time of need?*

🔗: *Instead of coming to Judah’s aid, what did Edom do?*

In Obadiah 10–12, the prophet continued his indictment against Edom. As the attack on Judah was carried out, the Edomites looked on from a distance as foreigners forced their way through city gates and pillaged all that was inside. They could have stood up for their relatives, but they stayed far away and let it all happen. Not only did they not intervene, they gloated over Judah’s destruction. The downfall of their distant relatives created satisfaction in their hearts. When Judah’s need was greatest, Edom applauded instead of intervening. In Obadiah’s mind, the familial relationship between the two nations increased Edom’s guilt, revealed by the way he frequently referred to Edom as “Esau,” their progenitor, and by using the term “brother” (Obadiah 10). Edom had a familial obligation to help Judah. Instead, they stood at a safe distance and applauded.

Q: *Who are you obligated to help in a time of need?*

Q: *Who is your church obligated to help in a time of need?*

APPLICATION POINT – Obadiah believed Edom’s guilt was multiplied because of their familial history. They had an obligation to help their relatives in their time of need. Who are we obligated to help in a time of need? This question is much like the one the lawyer posed to Jesus in Luke 10:25–37. Jesus responded with the parable of the good Samaritan. His point was that we have an obligation to help others in need when we encounter them. Since everyone is made in God’s image (Genesis 1:27), we have an obligation to care for anyone we see who is in need. This should be our general disposition. Helping people, however, can be complicated by sin in the world. There are people who look to exploit the generosity of others, much like Paul described in 2 Thessalonians 3:6–12. In Thessalonica, some people had stopped working because they believed the return of Jesus was imminent. They spent their time telling others to prepare for His return and claimed their “work” obligated others in the church to meet their needs. These people were capable of meeting their own needs. They were only stirring up descension. Paul did not believe the Thessalonian Christians were obligated to help those who were stirring up trouble (2 Thessalonians 3:10). To do so only serves to hinder the work of God. Paul alluded to a related situation in 1 Timothy 5:3 and 16. The church must care for widows in need, but the obligation of the widow’s family supersedes the church’s. The church cannot allow itself to become a tool to be used by relatives who do not want to care for the widow as they should. Both these situations pertain to issues within the church, but it is reasonable for us to conclude Paul would follow a similar line of reasoning concerning those outside of the church. Although Christians should always have a disposition to help others in need when they can, they must also be cautious of perpetuating sinful behavior by their generosity.

Q: *What actions underlie the prohibitions in Obadiah 13–14?*

Q: *Who were the fugitives and survivors Obadiah described in verse 14?*

In Obadiah 13–14, the prophet made the final accusation against the Edomites, which again comes in the form of a prohibition. The prophet was forbidding them from doing the very things they had already done. The rhetorical effect is to say, “The wrong nature of this behavior should have been obvious.” He condemned the Edomites opportunistic offense against the Judeans. The Edomites had used the desolation caused by another larger nation as an opportunity to do things they would never have dared to do had Judah been at full strength. The Edomites

entered the Judean cities and looted what remained after the invading army had left. They gloated over Judah's sorrows. They set up check points to find survivors who were attempting to return to their ruined cities and fields. They essentially behaved as the big bully's sidekick. After the bully did its damage, the sidekick taunted and demoralized the helpless victims.

Q: *How are we conditioned to say "yes" to every opportunity that comes our way?*

Q: *How should our commitment to God guide the opportunities we consider?*

APPLICATION POINT – The Edomites saw an opportunity for personal gain at Judah's expense, and they would not miss it. Their behavior is a good reminder for us that just because an opportunity presents itself does not mean we should take it. We are trained to think that the easiest or quickest path is the right one. Such a pragmatic outlook can cause us to overlook or compromise God's holy purposes. If an opportunity does not match the holy purposes of God, it is not one we should take. It doesn't matter if you can find a better paying job if it pulls you away from the role God has made for you in your family. It doesn't matter if you get all As in school if you have to sacrifice your prayer and devotional life to do it.

2. GOD'S RESPONSE

■ OBADIAH 15–21

Q: *Why did Obadiah broaden his focus to include all nations in verses 15–16?*

Q: *What did the judgment of the nations mean for the people of God?*

Obadiah's prophecy takes an unexpected turn at verses 15–16. Condemnation at the day of the Lord is expected, but the broadening of that condemnation from Edom to the nations is not. So far, Edom had been the focus of the prophet's attention. He had condemned Edom's actions against the people of God. But now he anticipated the destruction not only of Edom but of all the nations at the day of the Lord. He even attributed the wicked actions of Edom to the nations. The nations shall be repaid in like manner for what they have done, but the book only

focuses on the actions of Edom. The nations are said to have invaded God's holy mountain and drunk from its plunder, but it is only Edom who has done so in this prophecy. All will drink God's judgment poured out from His holy mountain. Obadiah's prophecy against the nations for what only Edom had done seems unfair until his reasoning is understood. Obadiah saw a pattern between what Edom did on this occasion and what the nations who oppose God's people will continue to do until the day God arrives in judgment. As he looked to the future, Obadiah foresaw not only the destruction of Edom but that of everyone who opposes the people of God.

When the nations are judged, the people of God will not only escape God's judgment, but they will become the means by which the nations are judged. Verse 18 calls Jacob a fire and Joseph a flame. Jacob and Joseph are a way of referring to the whole house of Israel. Esau is called stubble that will be consumed by the fire that is Israel, or the people of God. Modern readers should not overlook the rest of the Old Testament story when thinking about these verses. Wayward Israel will not act on their own initiative but will become instruments in God's hands. This judgment will be complete. Unlike the people of God who suffered at the hands of their enemies, there will be no survivors of God's judgment.

Q: *In what ways are the nations opposed to the people of God today?*

Q: *How is God's judgment of the nations a comfort to the people of God?*

APPLICATION POINT – The nations opposed the people of God in Obadiah's time and continue to do so today. But there is a key difference between Obadiah's time and ours. In Obadiah's time, the people of God were essentially synonymous with the people of Israel. They were a political as well as a spiritual entity. Today, the people of God is a spiritual reality, not a political one. The people of God includes everyone who confesses Christ as Savior. No nation can claim to be the people of God in the manner Old Testament Israel did. So, the nations cannot oppose the people of God by invading a specific land or laying siege to a certain city. But the nations still oppose the people of God to the degree that they oppose God's reign over the earth. By opposing God, they oppose God's people. God's coming judgment against those who oppose Him should give comfort to the people of God who are currently enduring the hostilities of the nations. The nations will not be able to protest righteousness forever. They will not be able to deny the reign of God forever. There will be a day when all opposition to God and His people is brought to an end. The people of God must only endure until that day.

- Q: *Verse 19 describes the people of Israel receiving their own lands and the lands of the surrounding nations. Why is this important within the context of Obadiah?*
- Q: *Verse 20 mentions exiles. Who are these exiles? Why is it significant that they possess the land of Israel?*

Although Obadiah is a book mainly about judgment, it ends with a note of hope for the people of God. The Israelites will return from their exile, and the land that was taken away from them will be regained. The people of Israel will obtain control over the surrounding nations, including Edom, all of which will comprise a kingdom that will be recognized as God's. Although Judah lay in shambles and the Edomites exploited the fallen nation, a day will come in which the people of God will find themselves under God's rule in His kingdom.

- Q: *How has the vision of the kingdom of God expanded beyond what is reported in Obadiah 19-21?*
- Q: *Why was it important for Obadiah to mention exiles returning when there may not yet have been any exiles from the land?*

APPLICATION POINT – The final sentence is crucial for understanding Obadiah's entire prophecy because it focuses the attention on God. The kingdom described at the conclusion of the book is God's kingdom. It will be gained by God's power. The judgment leading to this kingdom is His judgment of the nations. It is not the role of the people of God to bring judgment on the nations or to establish His kingdom. The people of God must simply endure through the hostilities of the nations until the time when God will intervene.

NEXT STEPS

Obadiah is a book about enduring sorrow while waiting for God to act. That is the challenge you need to think about over the next week. We now live in a culture that looks on Christian belief negatively. It is not just that people do not believe. They see Christianity as an obstacle to society moving to where they want it to go morally, spiritually, and politically. As this sentiment spreads, Christians will encounter more and more hostility. The challenge now is to engrain the core beliefs of Christianity so that as opposition rises, believers may endure until God arrives in judgment. Focus on understanding the core features of the Christian faith, such as the exclusivity of the gospel and the inerrancy of God's Word. Gain a firm understanding of the implications that Christian belief has in a culture that is becoming more hostile to it.

PRAY

+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.

-Father, help me to endure opposition. Help me make my convictions firm. Help me seek refuge in your coming.

-Lord Jesus, your resurrection has inaugurated the kingdom Obadiah foresaw. Help me to trust in the power of your resurrection in the face of opposition to my faith.

-Father, open my eyes to the ways in which I act like Edom. Help me to treat others with justice.

-God, fill my heart with mercy for those who are in need. Help me to be discerning.