

INTRODUCTION

Open your Bibles to the Table of Contents. Take a minute and find the page number for the book of Obadiah. It's about nine books from the end of the Old Testament. If you're using your iPad or Smartphone, just enter "Obadiah" in the search field.

This is the first of thirteen messages in a series I'm calling, "The Major Message of the Minor Prophets." As we get into the series you might notice I'm not teaching them in the order in which they appear in the Bible, instead I'm teaching them in the chronological order in which they wrote and preached. We're starting with Obadiah, because he lived about 850 years before Jesus was born and is considered the earliest of the writing prophets.

We're going to be looking at all 13 of the Minor Prophets, and I hope you'll join me in memorizing them. To make it easy for you I've written a little song we're going to sing each week. It goes like this, "And the prophets are Obadiah, Joel, Jonah, Amos Hosea, Micah, Zephaniah ..." Just kidding. There's no song for this series. Of course, you might remember the song by the Beatles inspired by this prophet: "Obladee-obladah-obladiah lah lah lah life goes on." Well, maybe they weren't singing about Obadiah.

Obadiah is the shortest book in the Old Testament, containing only twenty-one verses. It records God's honest evaluation of the nation of Edom. Sometimes evaluations can be painful. For instance, here are some actual job performance evaluations that supervisors have written about their employees:

1. This person has a room temperature IQ.
2. Gates are down, lights are flashing, but the train just isn't coming.
3. This employee should go far—and the sooner he starts, the better.
4. This young lady has delusions of adequacy.
5. Has a full six-pack, but lacks the plastic thingee to hold it together.
6. If brains were taxed, she'd get a huge refund.
7. This employee is depriving a village somewhere of an idiot.
8. This person is not so much a has-been, but is definitely a won't-be.
9. Was left on a tilt-a-whirl too long as a child.
10. Somehow slipped into the gene pool when the lifeguard wasn't watching.

Well, God's evaluation of the nation of Edom was painful as well. Edom was a little country in the wilderness known for a having a really good restaurant called El Sheddai. They were famous for their coconut cream pies and country-fried camel with mashed potatoes and gravy. Seriously, when we hear the name Edom, most of us think of the quaint little town just west of Tyler best known for The Shed Restaurant.

The Bible never says anything good about the nation of Edom, so I'm surprised the settlers named the community Edom in 1855. Maybe they didn't know their Bibles, or maybe, they did know their Bibles and they named it Edom because it is near a place called Red Hill, because the word "Edom" means "red." If any of you modern Edomites can shed some light on why the settlers named it Edom, please enlighten me.

Biblical Edom was named after Esau, the older brother of his better-known twin, Jacob. The name Jacob means "grabber" and Jacob grabbed for everything he could in his life. Esau means "red" and after Jacob and Esau's families split up, Esau's descendants settled into an area southeast of the Dead Sea and this nation was named Edom. When Moses was leading the children of Israel toward the Promised Land he asked if the Edomites would allow "their brothers" safe passage through Edom. The Edomites refused. Strike one. Later, in about 845 B.C. the Egyptian army attacked Judah and conquered the cities including Jerusalem. The people of Judah asked for help and the Edomites stood by and did nothing. Strike two. Not only did the Edomites ignore the plight of their cousins, they joined in the attack and plunder on Judah. Strike three. God sent Obadiah to tell the Edomites, "Your nation is going to disappear from the face of the earth." And indeed, the nation of Edom has ceased to exist. This is a good time to seriously consider, "Could America ever disappear from the earth?" If we make the same spiritual mistakes Edom made, it's a possibility. So we need to pay close attention to God's evaluation of the pride and arrogance of Edom.

Let's start by reading Obadiah 1:1-4. "The vision of Obadiah. This is what the Sovereign Lord says about Edom—We have heard a message from the Lord: An envoy was sent to the nations to say, 'Rise, and let us go against her for battle.'—See, I will make you small among the nations; you will be utterly despised. The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rocks and make your home on the heights, you who say to yourself, 'Who can bring me down to the ground?' Though you soar like the eagle and make your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down,' declares the Lord."

Now skip down to Obadiah 1:10-12. "Because of the violence against your brother Jacob, you will be covered with shame; you will be destroyed forever. On the day you stood aloof while strangers carried off his wealth and foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem, you were like one of them. You should not look down on your brother in the day of his misfortune, nor rejoice over the people of Judah in the day of their destruction, nor boast so much in the day of their trouble."

Finally, let's read Obadiah 1:15-16. "The day of the Lord is near for all nations. As you have done, it will be done to you; your deeds will return upon your own head. Just as you drank on my holy hill, so all the nations will drink continually; they will drink and drink and be as if they had never been."

Every prophet also delivers a message of hope, and here's the word of hope from Obadiah:

Obadiah 1:17-18. "'But on Mount Zion will be deliverance; it will be holy; and the house of Jacob will possess its inheritance. The house of Jacob will be a fire and the house of Joseph a flame; the house of Esau will be stubble, and they will set it on fire and consume it. There will be no survivors from the house of Esau.' The Lord has spoken."

In other words Obadiah predicted a time when God would return Mount Zion to the Jews. It happened during the Six Day War in 1967.

The main truth we can glean from both the Major and Minor Prophets is that God not only deals with individuals, He also deals with nations. Edom is a long-forgotten nation, but Israel is in existence today and is in the news almost daily. As we examine the message of Obadiah, let's consider God's Word to America, and then God's Word to me.

I. GOD'S WORD TO AMERICA

Earlier this year I read a book a couple of my friends recommended. It is called *The Harbinger*. It's written as a novel, but it seriously presents the claim that a verse in Isaiah is a specific word from God to the U.S. after the 9/11 attacks. It's a fairly interesting novel, but smarter scholars than me reject the idea that this obscure verse was written with America in mind. If you read the book, remember, it is pure fiction. However, there are some valuable warnings in the book about how unless America repents and turns to God, we will face His judgment. You don't need a 21st Century novel to learn that. There are numerous general principles from the Bible that apply to every nation, including America. Let's examine two.

A. Nations that reject God disappear into obscurity

This small book speaks of the great danger of the national sin of pride and invincibility. Obadiah begins his prophecy by revealing that Edom was proud of its natural defenses. In verse 3 he wrote, "The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rocks and make your home on the heights, you who say to yourself, 'Who can bring me down to the ground?'"

And Edom did have some amazing natural defenses. Today, one of their defensive positions is visited by thousands of tourists every day. It's called Petra and is located in Jordan. It is a remarkable geological formation of a narrow canyon stretching over a mile and then opening into a natural fortress where the ancient nations carved intricate castles and palaces. If it looks familiar to you, it's because "Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade" was filmed there. The Edomites thought they were invincible in Petra because an attacking army would have to travel through the narrow canyon and then face these massive fortresses carved into the face of the rock.

However, they were wrong. Petra fell. Today it is only a tourist attraction. God made a scary prediction about Edom in verse 10, "Because of the murderous history compiled against your brother Jacob, you will be looked down on by everyone. You'll lose your place in history. On that day you stood there and didn't do anything. Strangers took your brother's army into exile." (Obadiah 1:10-11 *The Message*) Notice those ominous words, "You'll lose your place in history." Edom must have laughed when they received this prophecy. They thought, "That will never happen! We're strong! We have Petra. We're invincible!"

Does that sound like America? There are two verses from God's word we need to hear and heed. The first is Psalm 9:17 which says, "The wicked shall return to the grave, and all the nations that forget God." The next is Proverbs 16:18 which says, "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall." A little bit of national pride goes a long way. It's one thing to chant "U.S.A." at the Olympics and Ryder cup. But it's another thing to be so proud we think we can't ever fall.

Those that say America is worse off now than ever before aren't very good students of American history. The darkest period of our history was the War Between the States when Americans were killing other Americans. In 1863, in the midst of the war, President Abraham Lincoln called for a Day of National Humiliation, Fasting, and Prayer. He said: "We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of heaven; we have grown in numbers, wealth, and power as no other nation has ever grown. But WE HAVE FORGOTTEN GOD. We have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these things were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us."

You may be thinking, "We need another day like that." For your information, Green Acres is hosting a day like this on Saturday October 27 in the Crosswalk Conference Center. We're calling it "America's Turning Point" and churches from all over East Texas are joining us from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. for a day of worship, fasting, and prayer for our nation.

James Montgomery Boice, a respected Presbyterian pastor and Theologian, wrote this about Obadiah's message to America: "Is the United States destined for destruction? We cannot say. She may recover her godly heritage. She may last until the Lord returns. But we should be warned by God's judgment on Edom. Do we boast that we are strong? That we have the greatest army, the most missiles, the most effective navy? Do we boast that our technology is superior to that of the rest of the world? If so, we must watch out! God says that He can bring even our nation down." (*The Minor Prophets*, Vol 1, p. 239)

Historians tell us there have been twenty-one great empires of the past, and all of them are gone. The Egyptian empire is gone and all that's left is a struggling country trying to survive. The great Persian Empire is gone, replaced by an isolated nation called Iran, which suffers from economic sanctions from the civilized world. The Greek Empire? Look at the struggling economy of Greece today. The Great Roman Empire? Gone. The Mighty Soviet Union, which put the first man into space, and which Khrushchev predicted would bury us? I've been there it's now a country in poverty and shambles. But there is hope for America because the Bible also teaches that

B. Nations that honor God find refuge

The Psalmist says, "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord." (Psalm 33:12) The Bible teaches that God is the One who establishes nations and He is the One who brings nations down. Edom never repented, and today they don't even exist. But if they had turned to the God of Israel and repented, they might still be in existence today. In Jeremiah we read where God says, "If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned." (Jeremiah 18:7-8)

In a couple of weeks when we study Jonah, you'll meet a wicked city-state named Nineveh that faced the prospect of annihilation. But they heard the message of the reluctant prophet, Jonah, and repented. God withheld His judgment.

People looking for religious freedom established our nation. They were the outcasts from the state religions of Europe. Pull out a coin or a dollar bill and you'll read the words "In God We Trust." America didn't always have this on our money, but we have for over 150 years.

In 1861 the Secretary of Treasury Salmon Chase, at the direction of President Lincoln, wrote a letter to James Pollock, the Director of the U.S. Mint: "Dear Sir, no nation can be strong except in the strength of God, or safe except in His defense. The trust of our people in God should be declared on our national currency. You will cause a device to be prepared without unnecessary delay with a motto expressing the in the fewest and tersest words possible this national recognition."

Mr. Pollock came up with the phrase "In God We Trust." This probably came from the final stanza of our national anthem. I've pointed out before that the first stanza, which is the only verse we sing, ends with an unanswered question, "Oh, say does that Star-Spangled Banner yet wave, o'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?" Frances Scott Key answered that question in his final stanza: "Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just, and this be our motto: 'In God is our trust.' And the star-spangled banner in triumph shall wave; O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave!" "In God we trust" was later officially adopted as our national motto.

A couple of years ago, President Obama spoke at the University of Jakarta in Indonesia and he said our U.S. motto is, "E pluribus Unum" which means "out of many one." A few days later Congress reminded him of his mistake and voted to renew our national motto as "In God we trust." In response President Obama said, "I trust in God. But God helps those who help themselves." No, Mr. President, that's not in the Bible.

There are individuals and forces in America who are aggressively trying to remove any reference to God from our public conversation. Lawsuits have been brought to remove "In God We Trust" from our coins. A few years ago the 9th Circuit Federal Court in California ruled in favor of an atheist's suit to have "Under God" removed from the pledge to the flag. Fortunately, the Supreme Court allowed it to stand. But here will be at least three new Justices named to the Supreme Court in the next four years, and depending on who is elected President, the new Justices could rule in favor of the atheists the next time this comes before them.

President Ronald Reagan wisely stated: "If we ever forget that we are One Nation under God, then we will be a Nation gone under."

II. GOD'S WORD TO ME

Any time you read the Bible you should ask three questions. First, what does the scripture mean to the original people to whom it was addressed? In this case, that would be Edom seven hundred years before Jesus was born. Second, what are the general spiritual principles in this scripture? We've answered that by talking about how nations that turn from God disappear from history; and nations that seek God receive His blessing. But the third question you must always ask is, "What is God saying to me?" That's the personal application.

Esau and his descendants founded Edom. In the Bible, the tension between Esau and Jacob is a picture of the struggle between our sinful nature and our spiritual nature. Esau's attitude is one we should avoid. The New Testament says this about Esau, "See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no 'root of bitterness' spring up and cause trouble, and by it the many become defiled; that no one be immoral or irreligious like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears." (Hebrews 12:15-17 ESV) The Bible says Esau was bitter. He was immoral and irreligious. He tried to repent, but it was too late. There are at least two personal lessons we can learn from Obadiah:

A. I can't ignore my neighbor when he suffers

That was the basic sin of the Edomites. Their neighboring country, and their extended family, was suffering and they stood by and ignored the need. In *The Message* paraphrase we read, "Godless foreigners invaded and pillaged Jerusalem. You stood there and watched. You were as bad as they were. You shouldn't have gloated over your brother when he was down-and-out. You shouldn't have laughed and joked at Judah's sons when they were face down in the mud." (Obadiah 1:12-13 *The Message*)

Back in the 1960s Bob Dylan was a popular singer/songwriter. He didn't have the greatest voice; he never would have made it on American Idol, or the Voice, but he wrote some great songs. In one of his most famous songs he asked the question, "How many times can a man turn his head, and pretend that he just doesn't see?" He said, "The answer my friend is blowin' in the wind." In the same song Bob asked, "And how many ears must one man have before he can hear people cry?" His answer was still blowin' in the wind. I have a better answer, "When you have the compassion of Jesus dwelling in your heart, you can't turn your head once when you see suffering or injustice. You can't plug your ears when you hear the cries of people in need." That was the sin of Edom. Judah was under attack, and they did nothing.

When Jesus was asked by a Pharisee about the greatest commandment, He responded by saying that Loving God with all our being is the greatest. But the second is to "love your neighbor as yourself." Then the Pharisee asked, "Who, then is my neighbor?" Do you know how Jesus answered him? He told the parable we call the Good Samaritan. Robbers had attacked a man, perhaps a Jew. He had been left half-dead and bleeding in the highway. A passing Levite priest ignored him. But a despised half-breed, a Samaritan, stopped to help. The point Jesus was making was clear. Your neighbor is anyone who is in need.

B. My only source of security is Jesus

The Edomites trusted in the rock formations of Petra to protect them, but in the end it didn't protect them from their enemies. Our federal government has a National Security division and since 9/11 we've created an entire new bureaucracy called the Department of Homeland Security. A nation's security can't be found in military might. The Bible says, "Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God. They are brought to their knees and fall, but we rise up and stand firm." (Psalm 20:7-8)

What is the source of your security? Is it your job? Many people in this down economy have discovered there is really no such thing as job security. Is your 401k, or your retirement pension your source of security? Do you remember those projections back in the 1990s that promised you'd retire with plenty of income, and now you're seen those investments shrivel? You trusted in the growing equity of your home, only to see it decrease in value. God has reminded us the last eight years that we can't put our trust in our economy.

Of course, there's an election coming. But our source of security can't be in our elected officials. The answer to America's problem isn't who's sitting in the Oval Office of the White House. Our only source is the One sitting on the Throne of heaven, King Jesus. The trouble with trusting in anything other than Jesus is that everything else is temporary, but Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and for evermore.

Could America ever disappear? Of course. This entire world will disappear one day. But those of us who have placed our faith in Jesus as our source of security will live on. Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away!"

CONCLUSION

There's hope for any nation and any person who puts their faith in Christ. Trivia time: What nation on planet earth is most the Christianized? People call America a Christian nation, but only about 20% of our population are evangelical Christians. South Korea has the largest churches in the world, but only about 30% of their people are Christians. Give up? It's the former U.S. Territory called the Republic of the Marshall Islands. According to Wikipedia, over 92% of the citizens are evangelical Christians. The remaining 8% are Catholic and Mormon.

My friend from Manila, Dr. David Sobrapeña, preached there this past year and he said he didn't see a single person smoking a cigarette, and he didn't see a single bar. People were polite and he didn't hear a single utterance of profanity while he was there. The Marshall Islands also has one of the lowest crime rates in the world. Why is God's favor on the Marshall Islands?

In 1960 an American missionary from Texas named Sam Sasser arrived with his wife. There were only a few Christians and the ones that met him told him that their grandparents were cannibals. One man told him that his grandparents' favorite meal was Missionary. The shaman of the dominant tribe met Sam Sasser and cursed him for bringing in his powerful God. But one of the children of the chief of the tribe had a sick son that the shaman had been unable to help. Sam Sasser prayed for the child and God healed him. The chief, who was like a King, said, "I want the God of Sam Sasser to be the God of the people of our Islands." Sam established over 30 churches.

While preaching from island to island he walked over toxic coral and suffered severe cuts which destroyed his feet, which made him lame and confined to a wheel chair. But he still preached. When his health deteriorated to the point he couldn't preach he returned to the U.S. and preached from a wheelchair in Plano. When he died in 1995 he requested his heart be removed from his body and buried in the Marshall Islands. Today, each year the Marshall Islands celebrate Sam Sasser Day as a national holiday.

There was a nation, steeped in pagan animism, and they heard the gospel and responded. God has blessed their nation because they have turned to Him. America, we need to return to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. We need to return to the God of Sam Sasser and beg God to forgive us and to heal our land. Can America ever disappear? If we think we can't, then that shows we're as proud as the nation of Edom. We need to humble ourselves, pray, and seek God's face and turn from our wicked ways. Then God will hear from heaven, forgive our sins and heal our land!

OUTLINE

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A. Nations that reject God disappear into obscurity

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes