

**Authentic Living – Major Themes from the Minor Prophets
Paying It Forward Really Pays (Obadiah)**



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This week as we continue our series about the Minor Prophets, which are the smaller prophetic books near the end of the Old Testament, we will be taking a look at Obadiah, the smallest of the books. It is only 21 verses long, so I hope you have been reading along using our Devotional Guide, then getting together with a friend or your Small Group to wrestle with the truths that God has placed for us in these books. For by doing this we can grow in our walk with God. However as you read Obadiah you will quickly find that it is talking about how God is very angry with a country named Edom and therefore he will move against them in judgment (Obadiah 1:8-10). Now, I am not sure what you were feeling as you read about what God was going to do to these poor Edomites, but it is easy to read this kind of scripture and find it very confusing. For when I read John 3:16 “God so loved the world that he sent his only son”, and in other places I read that God is love.

It is so powerful to hear that the Love of our God stands in such contrast to what the Muslims’ or many other religions believe in, for the Koran describes God as a harsh God, whom we need to fear and whom we have to appease. The concept of a loving God is not seen as a possibility in Muslim belief, for that is the exact opposite of what we believe. The most gentle words used to describe God in scripture is that He is ‘Our Father God’, He is the God who runs to meet the prodigal son when He finally comes home, He is the God who loves us enough to send Jesus to pay for our sins and He is the kind of God who understands and is touched by the things we struggle with (Hebrews 4:15). For not only is it that what the bible teaches us, but it is exactly the kind of God I want to have in my life. I can say that it has been my experience with God. Here is the hard part, after getting to know how loving and caring God is, when people read the Old Testament scriptures like Obadiah, it is easy to become confused and have a problem with the Old Testament God.

Before we even look at the passage this morning, can I remind you of what you believe in and how it applies to God. For while all of us love the idea that God is an all loving God and we wish everyone would live a gentle and generous life in which fairness always prevails, we

all still struggle with what we see, isn't always the way we want things to unfold in our world. How often does fairness and justice seem to be passed over? How often do the brutal and powerful do such horrible things in this world? That is what David struggled with in (Psalm 73:12-13) where he said 'This is what the wicked are like, always free of care, they go on amassing wealth. Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure and have washed my hands in innocence'. Jeremiah agreed when he said 'You are always righteous, O LORD, when I bring a case before you. Yet I would speak with you about your justice: Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the faithless live at ease?' (Jeremiah 12:1). Deep within us while we want love to rule, there is a second tug within us, for as we look at what happens around us, we crave to see justice prevail and those who hurt and abuse children and adults in so many ways, that those who do wrong suffer the fair consequences of their actions. On an even deeper level we ask, if God is a God of justice how can He let people get away with hurting, brutalizing and abusing others? For justice and fairness demand that God will balance the books and that those who have done evil will pay for their crimes. You see, while God is a 'God of love', a fuller and more complete view of God must include His ability at times to act harshly so that justice is not only done (in the after life, for that is what Hell is all about) but that it also is to be done in the here and now. That is one of the reasons why Obadiah is included in scripture. For it gives us a fuller view of God, in which He shows us that while He may not act as quickly as we would like Him to at times, He still responds and sees that justice is dealt with accordingly.

I. The History:

1. The History of the Region: While your Devotional guide says that Obadiah was written around 700 BC, I upon further study am convinced that the date should be between 585-565 BC. Which means it was written after 585 BC when Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians (Iraq). You will remember that after the hay day of Israel which was ruled by Solomon, the Jewish people split into 2 groups (Map A) Israel to the north (9 tribes) and Judah to the south (3 tribes). In 722 BC the Assyrians marched in and sacked Israel, deporting most of its inhabitants to Assyria. Leaving only Judah (in the area around Jerusalem where the temple was) a small and struggling country placed between Egypt to the south and the Assyrian empire to the north. Then in 612 BC the Babylonians overthrew the Assyrians (Map B) at the battle of

Carchemish in 605 BC, where the Egyptians were defeated by Nebuchadnezzar, over throwing Judah and taking many of it's youngest and brightest people (like Daniel) back to Babylon. However in 586 BC Judah's king joined Egypt in an attempted revolt and Nebuchadnezzar came back and sacked Jerusalem, destroying the temple and hauling away many of the Jewish people as slaves. On that day, the prophecies which we looked at last week in Amos 2 came to pass.

2. The History of the Relatives: Here is the second part of the story we need to mention. It begins in Genesis 25 when Isaac's wife 'Rebecca' was about to give birth to twins. They called the first son Esau and the second son Jacob. The strange thing was that as Esau was being born, Jacob the second son had his hand clamped tightly onto Esau's heel. What we learned was that Esau whom was the oldest of the two, was dad's favourite and Jacob whom was the youngest, was mom's favourite. If you remember the story from Sunday school it wasn't long until Jacob bribed his older brother into giving him the family inheritance which was supposed to go to the oldest son. Later on and with an elaborate costume, Jacob covered himself with the hide of a goat that made him feel like Esau. Tricking his father into believing he (Jacob) was Esau. Therefore gaining his father's blessing that was originally for Esau. This resulted in him having to leave his home and everything else, all because of a family feud that lasted for almost 20 years.

Finally, reconciliation happens between Esau and Jacob, one that would be remembered forever. Then from Jacob's 12 sons the nation of Israel and Judah is founded, who eventually live in and around Jerusalem. From Esau's children comes the nation of Edom. As we come to the book of Obadiah, please understand that it is written approximately 15 years after Nebuchadnezzar (Babylonian) destroyed Jerusalem and carried off Jacob's descendents into slavery. While the Edomites (Esau's descendents), watched and didn't even offer to help. Instead they joined in on the destruction and did some terrible things. Because of this, God "The all loving one" still believes in justice and sends them a message of what is in store for their future.

II. The Passage:

Obadiah, a book with only 21 verses begins by introducing us to the writer. His name is Obadiah, which means 'servant of Yahweh (God)' he introduces himself much like Paul does in the New Testament as Jesus' servant. That is all that we know about him. Wouldn't it be wonderful if on our Tombstone they summed up who we had been throughout our life with that simple description, "Dave, a true servant of God". With that, he get's right into his message by telling the folks in Edom to get ready, for God is about to do business with them.

1. Place/Petra: Obadiah 1:2-4 (Good Thing)

As you read these verses, what picture came to mind as to where the folks from Edom lived? If you missed this you have missed so much of what is yet to come. They lived in a place called Petra (one of the 7 wonders of the world, which wasn't known to the world until 1812). Do you remember that Esau was a hunter? It is the kind of place that only a hunter (someone who goes where no one else will venture). This is one of many amazing places in the world. It is in the desert of Jordon, where you will come across a slit in the rock wall where the widest part is 20'30 feet across, and the cliffs reaching up to 600 meters high. As you walk through the opening you see the entrance to the City, an amazing temple cut right out of the solid rock (probably took 150 years to carve it). As you continue on you see houses carved into the cliffs, showing some of the most amazing colors within the caverns themselves.

Still you continue down the path where you see fortresses along the valley wall, and where more astounding temples, and palaces are carved within, and theatre buildings that look like the coliseum. These dwellings go on for 40 miles inside the safety of the outside cliffs. But here is the most amazing part, these temples, palaces and fortifications come from the very time period this scripture was written. This was the home of Esau's descendents, the Edomites. Since this beautiful creation was situated near the Dead Sea (the trade route from Syria to Egypt) this desert city had a great source of water, which was gathered by tanks (cracks) in the rock wall, which collected water during the rainy season. Therefore because of

its location, the city of Petra could easily defend themselves against enemies from far and wide. With this one and only entrance into the city, it had become a rich and strong nation.

Now let's read Obadiah 1:2-4 again and it will make more sense. God says 'I know where you live and that you think your fortress is impenetrable. So know this, I am God and I can reach out and justice will be served. If you lived before 1989 and someone told you the Berlin wall would fall and Communism would collapse, or I asked you a few weeks ago if Egypt's Hosni Mubarak's 30 year rule as a dictator would end because of facebook or Moammar Gadhafi's rule of terror could be ended and that he would have to pay for his crimes. What would you say? Probably that they are too strong and too well guarded by their military. Or your comment might be, for example: during the Titanic one of the sailors said that "even God couldn't sink this ship". When we read these first few verses we are reminded that no matter how impossible it may seem, God can and will bring justice into the situations we face. God's promise is that in this life or the next, crime will not go unpunished. For the person who has been mistreated by their boss knows that it did not go unnoticed by God. For the bible says "I will repay says the Lord God". So know this, God will not let things slide. That is why we are able to rest in God's promise that "Justice is mine says the Lord God" for in leaving the righting of wrongs in God's hands we place judgment and justice where it can actually be melted out and we are free of carrying around the desire for revenge, which can destroy our hearts and infect our lives like poison.

2. Payment is due: (Tough Stuff)

Why was God so angry with Edom? Obadiah 1:10-14 has a long list of shouldn't have's. Obadiah 1:10, they shouldn't have had a violent history against their brother Jacob (doesn't say Israel, but instead your relative Jacob). Numbers 20 says that when they were in the dessert after leaving Egypt, Edom wouldn't give them water or even let them walk over their land (which was a short cut to Canaan). Obadiah 1:11, when the Babylonians sacked Jerusalem, they didn't help them fight for their lives. Obadiah 1:12, they shouldn't have gloated over the misfortune of Judah when they were taken away as captives. Obadiah 1:13, they shouldn't have stolen from those left behind who were defenceless. Obadiah 1:14, they shouldn't have caught those fleeing for their lives and turned them over to the Babylonians to

become slaves. Obadiah 1:15, they shouldn't have, but they did and because of that God said 'payment is due'. Galatians' 6:7 "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows". Harvest always comes to pass and most times the crop you reap is larger than the seed you sow.

So you see, there is a second side to story. For here is the sobering thought, when we shouldn't have the same is true concerning our lives as well. Matthew 10:26 'There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known'. Sometimes, like David who had the affair with Bathsheba we think because God didn't do business with us as we played with sin, cheated on our spouse or pulled the fast one at work, that we pulled one over on God. Obadiah's point is that even when Edom felt that God wasn't watching and that they had gotten away with their actions. He hadn't missed a thing. So here is the Tough Thing, if God must judge others for their actions, He must also judge those of us who are called his people. If he would allow Judah to face the consequences of their sin, don't for a moment think He won't do business with us as well. There is a new call to live holy lives, not just because we will reap what we sow, not just because God is watching, but because we want to live in the midst of his blessing and be open and free enough to walk through the doors the He wants to hold open for us.

3. Pride: (Surprising Thing)

Obadiah 1:2-4,8 Here is the amazing thing about this passage, while we have just listed the 'you shouldn't have's' in Obadiah 1:2-4;8 you will see that the number one thing which made God angry was their pride. They were proud about Edom's Petra beauty, fortifications, army and wise leaders. Which lead to their self sufficiency and needing God, but let's be honest, most of us today would consider that pride isn't that bad (it is almost necessary to survive in today's world isn't it?). Which is worse, one of our Children's Ministry Leaders getting caught shop lifting, or one of our Elders having an affair or the pride of one of our staff members? In our eyes there is no questions is there. Listen to God's point of view, Proverbs 16:6 'The Lord hates the proud'. Proverbs 16:18 "Pride goes before a fall'. Proverbs 29:23 "Mans pride will bring him low". James 4:6 says "God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble". God hates (pretty strong words), resists and stands against the proud. Why?

Because pride means “I can do it without God’ ‘I am sufficient in myself’ and ‘I don’t need God’.

I wonder if Edom was a proud nation because Esau the Redneck, hunter, stand on his own, self made man and did it his way that became the DNA of the nation.

Here in Calgary we live in a culture where there is always someone trying to tell you they know better and that unless you take charge and grab the bull by the horns or act as if you have no fear and are the best of the best you will never get ahead. So either we have a few successes in life and buy what the audience says about us or we allow our insecurity to make us over compensate by acting as if we know it all and know what is best, we have become just like the Edomites. For not only were they proud but because of who they were they felt entitled to take what they wanted from Judah when it was in a weak place. I read the other day about a flower delivery truck that had written across its side ‘Drive carefully, or the next load of flowers may be for you”. Obadiah is saying ‘as you watch God do business with Edom over their pride, take a moment to check your attitude and heart as well”. Listen instead to what II Chronicles 7:14 say’s “If my people will humble themselves and seek me I will heal their land”. We need to remember that as followers of Jesus Christ, the way ahead needs to be to humble ourselves under the powerful hand of God so that he can lead us, and if he desires in due time to lift us up and allow us to be a part of wonderful things. The way up is often down on our knees in this counter culture living called Christianity. As a church the call is to humbly seek God and then we are open enough to follow his leading.

4. Protection: (Wonderful Thing)

Don’t miss the fact that while God had to judge Edom for their sins, he had already judged Judah (his own people) for their sins. But here is the wonderful thing. Although they had left God, He was still bound by his covenant to love them Obadiah 1:17-18,20-21. What is this saying? There is always hope, always a chance for a new beginning. For as we bring ourselves humbly back to God, He (like the Prodigal Father we talked about at the beginning) is a Father of love who is ready and waiting to help us begin again. To take us back to that place where hope and new beginnings are possible once again.

Application:

Remember how you live affects those you love. Esau and Jacob fought for 20 years and although they eventually reconciled, their children had the memory and the experience of living with bitterness and hatred toward their cousins. The sins of the fathers became the sins of not only their children but generations to come. Remember that how you live will affect others, especially those you love.

Remember how you live affect's others. What we saw was that how those from Edom lived affected their neighbours (Judah). The result was that because they didn't care for others (paid it forward) Judah was hurt. Sometimes we also forget that our neighbours, our classmates and those we work with watch and learn are affected by how we live our lives. As God has blessed you, bless others and Pay it forward.

Remember how you live affect's you. That may sound strange, but today Edom is just an archaeological tourist attraction. No one lives there anymore. Their life style and attitudes caught up with them. Live well so you can live long and prosper.

Obadiah's 21 verses give us the luxury of hide sight. So we can look back in order to learn more about God, how He is loving and just at the same time. So that we may live wisely before God.

