

THE PERIL OF PRIDE

Obadiah 1-21

Introduction:

Some of God's most severe words in the Bible are not addressed to the broken and ashamed sinner. They are addressed to the proud, to those who are self-righteous, smug in their attitude of self-sufficiency and indifference to others.

Prov 6:16-19 "There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers."

Of all the things the Lord hates, the first thing on that list is haughty eyes—having a proud heart.

Today we want to look at the message of Obadiah – another of those Minor Prophets – yet his message is far from being minor. It is a severe and condemning message to those who are proud. And as one writer says, "If we are honest with ourselves, we might even confess that we know more than a little bit about that subject."

I. The Setting

I would like to share with you some background information from the Living Insights Study Bible (Charles Swindoll):

Historically, you may be surprised to know that the context of this message was a family feud. This family feud went back centuries ago to a set of twins born into an ancient Hebrew family... and those twins were named Jacob and Esau. You see, Jacob ripped off his brother's birthright. He took unfair advantage of him, and as a result, Isaac's blessings fell on Jacob, the younger, rather than on Esau, the older. Esau never forgot it. But he had his own set of problems: Because he was a man of passion and fleshly appetite, he went for the food. He cared little for the document that declared his rights as the older brother. He

gave it all up. And Jacob, chiseler that he was, got it from him and cashed in on the benefits. It was way back then that the conflict began.

Time passed. Esau lived like a Bedouin in the desert until finally he settled in the land of Edom, a little finger of land south of the Dead Sea about 100 miles long and 40 to 50 miles wide. There he and his descendants after him lived and made life miserable for the Israelites. Why? Because of the family feud! Because of lingering hatred toward the people of Israel, Jacob's descendants. Because Jacob had at one time taken advantage of their forefather, Esau.

The Edomites lived in a rugged landscape that provided a formidable, impregnable fortress, or so they thought. You see, in order to work your way into the fortress of Edom, you have to enter through narrow rocky terrain at an area called Petra. If you had a million man army, you would have to enter one man at a time. That is why the Edomites felt very secure in their stronghold. So, they would go down from their mountain stronghold, buzz the community of Israel and make life downright miserable. After the skirmishes they would quickly return to their rocky residence high on the hillside, look down and enjoy a round of hearty laughter.

As a matter of fact, when Jerusalem was invaded by foreign troops on several occasions, the Edomites rejoiced over her calamity. They were gloating over Israel's misfortune. Sitting high atop their perch, saying to themselves, 'How great it is to see our brothers hurt.' Centuries passed . . . and those feelings of prejudice just intensified. It looked like Edom would be secure forever and Israel would be vulnerable forever. With cruel delight they took pleasure in Israel's pain.

That's the background of the book of Obadiah, and unless we know it, this little book will seem to be hopelessly irrelevant. But armed with that information, the book takes on a whole new meaning for us. Obadiah's message came some 1100 years after the dispute began between Jacob and Esau, yet the feud was still going on. And the Edomites (descendants of Esau) were proud of their power and security. But God's message is that their destruction is inevitable.

Let's have a look at his message to them and to us...

II. The Inevitability of Destruction

A. The Summons to the Nations for Destruction (v 1)

The Lord has sent a messenger among the nations to stir them up to war against Edom. The Lord has spoken, so it is certain. Destruction is coming.

B. The Source of Destruction is God Himself (vs 2-4)

1. God's perspective (2a,4b)

God was going to be the source of their destruction. Edom wanted to be a powerful nation. They sought to control the trade routes. But they were never a force to be worried about. They thought they were secure in their stronghold, but God says they will be brought down. We have God's very clear statement in 2a and 4b. God says he will make them small in 2a and He will bring them down in 4b. This is contrasted with what is in between these statements in vs 3.

2. Edom's pride (3)

C. The Thoroughness of their Destruction (5-6)

More thorough than a robber at night (5a). A robber only takes the valuables. God wasn't going to leave anything. More thorough than a grape gatherer during the day (5b). When you do harvesting by hand, there are always a few berries or grapes left. But not when God is through with you. The implication is that there won't be anything left.

D. The Means of their Destruction: Edom's allies (7)

There is nothing quite as disheartening as having one's friends turn against one. Yet that is what happened to Edom. Their own allies, probably the Moabites and other nations in that same area, turned on them, and ultimately destroyed them.

There is also some historical evidence that a nation of people known as the Nabateans could be referred to here. The Nabateans were caravan drivers and traders whom the Edomites trusted and traded with. They were their business partners. They were allowed into the city, but they turned against the Edomites and conquered them.

Their destruction came at the hands of their own allies.

E. The Scope of their destruction (8-9)

God would destroy the wise men and the mighty men in Edom. During the coup, the leaders were killed first and eventually everyone else was slaughtered or deported. No one would escape the destruction promised by God.

III. The Reason for the Destruction vv. 10-14

A. The underlying sin: violence to his "brother" Judah (10)

These two nations began with Jacob and Esau. They should have been allies whenever foreign nations attacked one or the other, but we will see Edom's response was when Judah was attacked. What Edom is being judged for is failure to obey one of the underlying principles of the law. The summary of the law was to love God and to love your neighbor. Even though Edom was not under the law of Moses, they still were responsible before God because their conscience should have told them they were violating the law of love.

B. The specific actions: (11 - 14)

Now Obadiah explains how they failed to show love for their neighbors.

1. Indifference to Judah's troubles (11)

When Judah was being attacked by Gentiles, Edom should have come to help his brother, but he stood aloof. He condoned the evil that was taking place.

2. Rejoicing over Judah's troubles (12).

They had an attitude such as, "better them than us." This is also part of the condoning of sin, but it shows a progression towards a more advanced stage of evil. They aren't just indifferent, they are glad that it is happening to Israel.

3. Looting Judah's possessions (13).

This is like people who loot a city after a hurricane or some other disaster. If you can have degrees of evil, this is one of the lowest forms of theft. It is taking advantage of another's calamity.

4. Oppressing Judah's people (14).

When the Israelites fled from their enemies and headed to the south, Edom was there to capture the fugitives and then they sold the survivors as slaves.

Discuss the downward trend of Edom's sin ...

- condoning sin

IV. The Day of the Lord vv. 15-21

Obadiah was probably the first prophecy written of the 16 OT prophets, which would mean that we have here presented for the first time the concept of the Day of the Lord. This refers to a period of time when the Lord returns to judge the people of this earth.

Throughout these verses there seem to be multiple fulfillments referred to – the destruction of the Edomites, the judgment of Israel and the judgment of the nations of the world.

Conclusion and Application

So what is the message of this book for us today? (*See the Life Lessons from Obadiah in the Living Insights Study Bible*)

1. If we hold grudges or attempt to take revenge, our own failure is certain. The Edomites found this out the hard way. Esau and his descendants resented Israel and they eventually paid for it.
2. If we are proud and take pleasure in the calamity of others, our own success will be diminished.
3. If we think we are secure in what we have earned and built for ourselves, our situation is sure to change.

Beware of the attitudes of self-sufficiency, self-righteousness, and self-centered judgment of others. These are deadly attitudes which lead to a hard heart, a heart of stone, a heart that will not get along with others and ultimately a heart that cannot and will not get along with God.

We can be sure that God will judge such attitudes. Maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow, but eventually we will pay for our pride.