

Eagle Edom Will Come Down

by John Piper

The book of Obadiah teaches that God rules in this world, pride is deceptive, and God abominates pride, but offers salvation to those who humble themselves and trust in Him.

Scripture: Psalm 22:28, Psalm 76:7, Obadiah 1:1, Matthew 5:5, Luke 16:15, Romans 4:13, Galatians 3:28

Topics: "Gods Judgment", "Pride And Humility"

Description

John Piper preaches on the book of Obadiah, the shortest Old Testament book, which delivers a prophecy against Edom and focuses on the vindication of Israel and the establishment of God's kingdom. The prophecy reveals that God's oppressed people should take courage as wrongs will be righted through judgment, and God will rule openly with His people in safety forever. The message emphasizes the consequences of pride, the deceptive nature of pride, God's abomination of pride, the principle of reaping what is sown, and the promise of escape and salvation from God's wrath through humility and trust in Him.

Transcript

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Obadiah

Obadiah is the shortest Old Testament book (21 verses). We don't know anything about the author's background. There are eleven other people with this name in the Old Testament but there is no evidence for connecting this prophet with any of them. The prophecy was delivered after the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. and has two main parts. Verses 1-16 are directed against Edom (the descendants of Esau who lived to the southeast of the Dead Sea), and verses 17-21 focus on the vindication of Israel and the final establishment of God's kingdom on earth. The main point of the prophecy seems to be that God's oppressed people should take courage because God is still the righteous Master of the Universe: wrongs will be righted through judgment, and the Judge of all the earth shall rule openly someday with all his people in safety forever.

Let's read the book together, making some explanatory observations along the way. Then we will ask what lessons are here for our life as Christians.

Verse 1: "The vision of Obadiah. Thus says the Lord God concerning Edom: We have heard tidings from the Lord and a messenger has been sent among the nations: 'Rise up! Let us rise against her for battle!'"

The first thing the prophet tells us is that his vision is from the Lord and that it concerns the nation Edom, and that there is a report that has gone out from the Lord to the nations to prepare them for battle against Edom. Then God himself addresses Edom directly in verses 2-16.

"Behold, I will make you small among the nations, you shall be utterly despised. The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rock, whose dwelling is high, who say in your heart, 'Who will bring me down to the ground?' Though you soar aloft like the eagle, though your nest is set among the stars, thence I will bring you down, says the Lord." Here the Lord declares to Edom the root cause of her impending doom: her pride which has deceived her into thinking she is secure as an eagle above the reaches of men. But God declares, Eagle Edom will come down. Then the Lord describes how thorough her destruction will be.

Verse 5: "If thieves came to you, if plunderers by night (how you have been destroyed!) would they not steal only enough for themselves? If grape gatherers came to you would they not leave gleanings? How Esau has been pillaged, his treasures sought out!" In other words, the ruin that God will bring upon Edom will be total, not like a thief or a grape gatherer who always leave something. Verse 7: "All your allies have deceived you, they have driven you to the border; your confederates have prevailed against you; your trusted friends have set a trap under you--there is no understanding of it." The Edomites will have nowhere to turn and they have no understanding of the fact all their former allies have turned against them. This is the fulfillment of verse 1 where God sends out a report to summon the nations against Edom.

Verses 8 and 9: "Will I not on that day, says 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." Teman was a grandson of Esau and a chief city in Edom--evidently a cultural and military center where the intellectual and military elite gathered. But God is not impressed or threatened: he will cut them off in their pride, wise and powerful together.

Then in verses 10-14 we see how Edom's pride had shown itself during the time of Israel's deepest need and humiliation when the Babylonians were carrying them off into exile.

"For the violence done to your brother, Jacob (that is, to the people of Israel), shame shall cover you and you shall be cut off for ever. On the day that you stood aloof, on the day that strangers carried off his wealth, and foreigners entered his gates, and cast lots for Jerusalem, you were like one of them. But you should not have gloated over the day of your brother, in the day of his misfortune; you should not have rejoiced over the people of Judah in the day of their ruin; you should not have boasted in the day of distress. You should not have entered the gate of my people in the day of his calamity; you should not have gloated over his disaster in the day of his calamity; you should not have looted his goods in the day of his calamity. You should not have stood at the parting of the ways to cut off his fugitives; you should not have delivered up his survivors in the day of distress." When a person is in the bondage of pride he takes whatever opportunity he can to exalt himself over others. Nations, adults and little children have this in common: apart from the grace of God we all tend to derive pleasure from another person's failure. It soothes our inadequacies and magnifies our successes. Edom relished the destruction of Judah, stood aloof, gloated, boasted, looted and cut off the stragglers.

Obadiah and his people knew that their own distress and calamity were deserved. Judah had sinned and God had promised judgment, as Habakkuk had said. But they also knew that Edom, too, was guilty. But Edom should have seen God's judgment on Judah and trembled. She should have humbled herself and

repented of her own pride and cried out to the Lord for mercy lest she fall prey to a similar fate (cf. Luke 13:1-5). But instead she gloated. And God reveals to Obadiah that he will not let this sin go unpunished.

Verses 15 and 16, "For the day of the Lord is near upon all the nations. As you have done, it shall be done to you, your deeds shall return on your own head. For as you have drunk upon my holy mountain, all the nations round about shall drink; they shall drink and stagger, and shall be as though they had not been." Obadiah looks into the future and sees the great and terrible day of the Lord coming when all accounts will be settled. But, in typical prophetic perspective, Obadiah does not distinguish between the more immediate historical judgments of God upon Edom and the final day of judgment at the end of the age. The near future and the distant future merge in the prophet's vision. For what matters is not so much the timing of the judgment but that justice is going to be achieved: the violent nation will not boast forever. Very soon the recompense will come and after that all the nations will render an account to God.

That's the end of part one: verses 1-16. Eagle Edom will come down because of her pride and violence.

In part two, verses 17-21, Obadiah assures the people of Judah that on the day of the Lord there will be hope for those in Zion. Since Judah had recently been driven into exile for her unbelief, and since judgment was coming upon Edom and the nations because of their pride and violence, we must assume that the people who escape God's judgment are those who humble themselves and trust God for his mercy (as Habakkuk 2:4 said). So the second part of the book holds out the hope of salvation to the remnant of Israel and promises that in the end the Kingdom will not belong to the Babylonians nor to the Edomites but to the Lord.

Verses 17-21: "But in Mount Zion there shall be those who escape, and it shall be holy. And the house of Jacob shall possess their own possessions. The house of Jacob shall be a fire and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau stubble; they shall burn them and consume them, and there shall be no survivor to the house of Esau; for the Lord has spoken. Those of the Negeb shall possess Mount Esau, and those of the Shephelah, the land of the Philistines; they shall possess the land of Ephraim and the land of Samaria, and Benjamin shall possess Gilead. And the exiles of this host of the sons of Israel who are among the Canaanites as far as Zarephath, and the exiles of Jerusalem who are in Sepharad, shall possess the cities of the Negeb. Saviors shall go up to Mount Zion to rule Mount Esau; and the Kingdom shall be the Lord's." The promises made long ago to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that they and their descendants would possess the land will not be frustrated.

From our New Testament perspective we can see how much larger the fulfillment will be than Obadiah saw. The people of God is not to be limited to the Jewish remnant but now reaches out to embrace all those who trust Christ. "There is neither Jew nor Greek ... for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:28,29). And not only is the people of God larger than Obadiah foresaw, but the fulfillment of the promised land is bigger. Paul says in Romans 4:13 that the descendants of Abraham will inherit the world, not just a near eastern territory of Palestine. And Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5).

And isn't this implied at the very end of Obadiah. He closes with the words, "and the kingdom shall be the Lord's." Can we really imagine that God would establish his own final kingdom in such a way that he would only rule over a portion of the earth? No. As Psalm 22:28,29 says, "The kingdom belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations. Yea, to him shall all of the proud of the earth bow down; before him shall bow all who go down to the dust." Repentant, Christ-honoring Israel will have her land, but it will be only one little

province in the world-wide kingdom of the Lord. And like all the other provinces it will be freely shared with people from every tongue and tribe and nation who have accepted Jesus as Savior and submitted to him as King.

In conclusion now, let me draw out five brief lessons which will affect the way we live. First, God rules in this world right now and turns the course of nations and history as he pleases. If this were not so he could not promise Judah that he would cut off Edom and establish Jacob. No Christian should have the jitters that the world is careening out of control toward a meaningless catastrophe. We may feel like people tossed around in an old stagecoach pulled by six wild horses, but fear not, God sits serenely over our heads and the hands that made the world hold the reins.

Second, pride is deceptive. Verse 3: "The pride of your heart has deceived you." Pride makes us think we are independent, self-sufficient, invulnerable. Pride is based on a lie. The person who yields to the temptation of pride surrenders his capacity to think and feel and act without deception. Pride distorts every area of thought and life. My own conviction is that most of our perplexity regarding moral and theological issues is owing to the distortions caused by our pride, not to the complexity of the issue.

Third, God abominates pride and will bring it down. Verse 4: "Though you soar aloft like the eagle, though your nest is set among the stars, thence I will bring you down, says the Lord." Or as Jesus says in Luke 16:15, "What is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God."

Fourth, therefore proud nations and proud individuals will reap what they sow. Verse 15: "As you have done, it shall be done to you, your deeds shall return on your own head." If we choose in our pride to live without God, then he will grant us our independence in the day of the Lord. And he will not be our refuge or our righteousness in that day. And our self-confidence will be like a feather in a hurricane when God's wrath is revealed from heaven (cf. Ps. 76:7).

Fifth, God has made a way of escape and salvation from his wrath. Verse 17: "In Mount Zion there shall be those that escape, and it shall be holy." Those who have fled from the wickedness of pride to the holiness of humility will find refuge on the day of the Lord. Zion, the city of God, shall be holy because it will be filled, not with people who never sinned, but with people who have been broken and humbled by their sin and have thrown themselves for mercy on Jesus and have come to love him more than anything and any person in the world because "he loved us and gave himself for us."

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