

(4) Putting the world to rights

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[0 : 00] I'm going to read the whole of the book of Obadiah, which can be found on page 933.

Obadiah is starting to read at verse 1. The vision of Obadiah. Thus says the Lord concerning Edom. We have heard a report from the Lord, and a messenger has been sent among the nations.

Rise up, let us rise against her for battle. 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, in your lofty dwelling, 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, from there I will bring you down, declares the Lord. If thieves came to you, if plunderers came 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!

[1 : 22] All your allies have driven you to your border. Those at peace with you have deceived you. They have prevailed against you. Those who eat your bread have set a trap beneath you.

You have no understanding. Will I not on that day, declares the Lord, destroy the wise men out of Eden, and understanding out of Mount Esau?

And your mighty men shall be dismayed, O T-man, so that every man from Mount Esau will be cut off by slaughter. Because of the violence done to your brother Jacob, 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 do not gloat over the day of your brother in the day of his misfortune. Do not rejoice over the people of Judah in the day of their ruin. Do not boast in the day of distress.

[2 : 25] Do not enter the gate of my people in the day of their calamity. Do not gloat over his disaster in the day of his calamity. Do not loot his wealth in the day of his calamity.

Do not stand at the crossroads to cut off his fugitives. Do not hand over his survivors in the day of distress. 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 on my holy mountain, so all the nations shall drink continually.

They shall drink and swallow, and shall be as though they had never been. 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 afire, and the house of Joseph aflame, and the house of Esau stubble.

[3 : 26] They shall burn them and consume them, and there shall be no survivor for the house of Esau, for the Lord has spoken. Those of the Negev shall possess Mount Esau, and those of the Shephelah shall possess the land of the Philistines.

They shall possess the land of Ephraim, and the land of Samaria, and Benjamin shall possess Gilead. The exiles of this host of the people of Israel shall possess the land of the Canaanites, as far of Zarephath, and the exiles of Jerusalem, who are in Sepharad, shall possess the cities of the Negev.

Saviors shall go up to Mount Zion to rule Mount Esau, and the kingdom shall be the Lord's.

Heavenly Father, we thank and praise you for the light and clarity of your word.

We praise you that in it we meet the Lord Jesus, we are fed by him, and taught everything we need to know about life and godliness. And so we ask, Father, that you would feed us now by your Holy Spirit through these last verses of Obadiah.

Please bring us closer to the Lord Jesus. Please strengthen us in our walk of faith with him. We ask it for Jesus' sake.

[4 : 47] Amen. Amen. Now, often when we are going through some trial or some difficulty, we remind ourselves that one day in the future, these trials will come to an end.

So we envision that day and what it will be like when it's all over. And that vision of the future where it spurs us on in the present. So it could be that relief of finishing the final exam, all the pressure over.

It could be the completion of some work project that's been keeping us up for weeks and finally the stress goes. It could be the joy of giving birth after all those painful hours in labour.

It could be recovering from some illness that has kept us bedridden and out of action for so long.

We envision that future day when it will all be over and it gives us hope in the present now.

Knowing how great it will be, well, it helps us to sort of, in these examples, keep revising, keep working, keep pushing. The future reassures us amidst the trials and afflictions we're facing because knowledge of the future helps us in the present to face difficulties.

[6 : 14] And what God wants to teach us from Obadah 17 to 21 is that it's just the same in the Christian life. No matter the trials we are facing, the difficulties, the sufferings, the persecutions, God wants us to remember the future.

His certain glorious future when not only will all our afflictions come to an end, but all our fortunes will be restored.

God wants his vision of the future which he lays out in these verses 17 to 21 to give us hope, to spur us on, to reassure us in the here and now.

Because knowledge of God's future helps us as Christians in the present, particularly amidst persecution. And this was just the case for God's people at the time this prophecy was first spoken. If you're joining us here today, as Matt says, we have spent the last month looking at the prophecy of Obadah, a prophecy which God gave to his people in response to horrific persecution that they had faced at the hands of the Edomites.

[7 : 32] We saw in the first part of the prophecy, verses 1 to 16, that God reassured his people that Edom would not get away with this horrific persecution. Judgment is coming on them.

It's imminent, it's certain, justice will be done. And they could be certain of it because of this awesome and terrible day of the Lord which is coming upon all nations.

Well, now in the second part of the prophecy that we're looking at this morning, God draws out the implications of this day of the Lord for his people. We're going to see their sufferings will end, their trials will be over, their fortunes will be restored.

God gives his people a glorious vision of the future. And it's this vision of the future which is to give his people hope in the present amidst persecution.

Well, let's turn and look at the verses now. We're going to see three important truths about God's vision of the future. I should say this is different to the points on the handouts. Sorry about that. This thought went through a rewrite or two.

[8 : 39] But the three truths are this. First, we're going to see the future is one which belongs to God. Secondly, the future is one of comprehensive blessing.

Third, the future is one of victory over God's enemies. Let me say that again for those of you who take notes. First, the future is one which belongs to God. Secondly, the future is one of comprehensive blessing.

Third, the future is one of victory over God's enemies. And in each case we'll see how it gives us hope today in the face of persecution.

First then, the future is one which belongs to God. We can see this to be the case from the last sentence of Obadiah. The kingdom shall be the Lord's. The future belongs to God.

No one else. The future of this world shall not belong to Edom nor any other power or nation or institution. At the time it may have looked to God's people that it did belong to Edom.

[9 : 44] But this is just an illusion because this is God's world. He owns it. The kingdom is and always will be the Lord's. The future belongs to God.

And if you look at the beginning and end of the passage you'll see where this future is heading, where it will be. So in verse 17 we read but in Mount Zion there shall be those who escape and it shall be holy.

And verse 21 Saviours shall go up to Mount Zion to rule Mount Esau and the kingdom shall be the Lord's. Now this term Mount Zion refers to God's dwelling place.

It's a place of his loving care his powerful protection. his people would have recalled the glory days of King David and King Solomon when the name Zion was first used when God dwelt amongst his people reigning as king providing safety and security to all who trusted him.

Well this is what the future will be like. This is where the world is heading. The universe is not spiralling out of control into some meaningless explosion.

[10:58] the climax of creation is the establishment of God's kingdom. God ruling in love and power from Mount Zion. And this would have come I take it as great assurance to God's people at the time to be reminded that the future belongs to God.

It's focused on Mount Zion. There they are being carted off into exile a broken people suffering and persecuted and they hear those precious words but in Mount Zion there shall be those who escape. How great to know that one day they would escape the humiliation and affliction of exile and once again return to Mount Zion. How wonderful to know that this is where the future is heading.

That one day their suffering would be over their ordeal would come to an end. And this is a great reminder for us isn't it that the future belongs to God and no one else.

During times of persecution we can wonder whether this really is God's world God's country God's dallage as we said last week this nation is increasingly treating Christians in the same way Edom treated Israel writing us off as a spent force gloating over apparent weakness in the church joining in with others and squeezing us into the world's mould trying to shut us up and wanting to treat us like people of the past but these verses remind us that we are people of the future we are people with a great future because the future belongs to God and so one day all the persecution we face now well it will come to an end no matter how bad it gets for us in the meanwhile so that's the first thing God wants to tell us from this vision of the future it is one that belongs to him secondly he wants us to see how great this future is a future of comprehensive blessing you may have noticed when this part of the passage was read out that the word possess dominates these last few verses in the prophecy so in verse 17 we read the house of Jacob shall possess their own possessions and then glancing down to verses 19 and 20 we are told six times of the different land that God's people will one day possess now why all this talk of possession and land well the people of God as we've seen have just lost all their land their homes their belongings their wealth and so on one level these verses reassure them that in the future

[13:58] God will completely restore their fortunes but also the promise of land was intimately bound up with God's blessing of his people might be significant that verses 19 to 20 begin and end with this reference to the Negev which we first read about in Genesis 12 when God originally made the promise of land to Abraham the whole story of Israel's history throughout the Old Testament was an outworking of this initial promise to Abraham and God is now saying that they will finally come into full possession of this promised inheritance all of God's land will be possessed look through verse 19 with me they'll possess the Negev and Mount Esau which is in the south they shall possess the land of the Philistines to the west they shall possess the land of Ephraim Samaria the north and Benjamin shall possess

Gilead in the east south west north east you shall have it all all the land with the peace and prosperity and blessing which comes with it and yet there's more because all of God's people will live in this land too you may remember that God's people split into two kingdoms the northern kingdom called Israel the southern kingdom called Judah with that in mind look at verse 20 it says the exiles of this host of the people of Israel shall possess the land and the exiles of Jerusalem the capital city of the southern kingdom shall possess the land isn't this a wonderful way of demonstrating that all of God's people both the north and southern kingdom will be dwelling in all of God's land south west north east this is your future says God to his people it's a future of comprehensive blessing now again this would have come as assurance to them wouldn't it one of the horrors of persecution

I suppose is what you lose through it friends family some Christians around the world if it's as bad as it was here it can be loss of possessions loss of home loss of life why would you keep going with God in the face of persecution if it meant you would lose everything well because one day in the future you will possess it all again and some comprehensive blessing complete restoration now from our New Testament perspective we know that this promise of land was far more glorious than a patch of land in the Middle East when Jesus Christ returns to earth he's promised to bring in a

brand new creation a perfect land stretching the world over the whole universe over and we'll spend eternity enjoying the blessings of that world peace poverty made history the end of global warming we're talking about an infinitely safe and secure world where there'll be no more wars with these persecutions no more worries no more fear or failure this new world will be peaceful and prosperous with complete enjoyment and total satisfaction for God's people for eternity how doesn't that spur us on to keep trusting in Jesus as king and redeemer whatever comes our way in the terms of persecution whether it's this year or in 20 years time nothing can take away this glorious future of ours anything sacrificed now for the sake of Christ will be restored to us in the new creation the apostle

Peter talks about an inheritance that's undefiled imperishable unfading kept in heaven for us seen in John's gospel in our study groups Jesus talking about preparing a room for us in his father's house new creation heaven it's our home perfect safe secure and no one can take it from us even if the persecution were to get as bad as our own death our future is one of comprehensive blessing and we will share this future with all of God's people no more broken relationships due to persecution no more lost friendships sad goodbyes no more people left behind this future is one of community and relationship closeness and intimacy within the family of God and ultimately of course it will be one where we see the Lord Jesus face to face and enjoy the infinite delight of a perfect relationship with him this is the vision of our future our certain future and God wants us to know it to keep us going as Christians amidst the persecutions we face so the future is one that belongs to

God future is one of comprehensive blessing thirdly and finally the future is one of victory over God's enemies look at verse 18 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 for the house of Esau for the Lord has spoken so God's people the house of Jacob and Joseph will have victory over their enemies the house of Esau the fire representing God's holy presence will burn and consume the wickedness of Edom there should be no survivor and they could be certain of this victory for the Lord has spoken now although this is strong language to our ears again it would have come as more reassurance to God's people in the current moment it looked as though

[20 : 30] Edom were victorious and God's people defeated and it could be that amidst their ruin and distress at the hands of the Edomites God's people were ready to give up on God but God reassures them that one day the tables will be turned keep trusting in God and one day there will be victory over your enemies we see a similar principle of the tables turning in verse 21 when saviors that is rulers harking back to the time of the judges when rulers shall go up to Mount Zion to rule Mount Esau it may seem you're being ruled by Edom today but one day in the future you will be the rulers now it's difficult to know how to apply verse 18 to ourselves whether this is representative of Jesus on the final day of judgment when all our enemies will be destroyed

Jesus does say to his disciples truly I say to you in the new world when the son of man will sit on his glorious throne you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel the apostle Paul does say to the Corinthians do you not know that the saints will judge the world do pick up on that in question time if you like but what is clear what we can say from verse 18 is that in the future we will have victory over our enemies and again this is a spur to us to keep going in the face of persecution now sure we've all got people in positions of power over us and it may seem that some of them disregard or undermine the gospel of Christ or Christians could feel that they rule over you whether it's a boss the media politicians some bishop who denies the central tenets of the faith but again God is reassuring us that one day all persecution against his church all powers and individuals who set themselves up against

God and over us will one day be defeated we can keep trusting God and be sure of victory now just to be clear this victory over enemies is not to be thought of in some vindictive sense we need to remember last week that God is the judge not us and so we're not to take matters into our own hands we need to remember what was said in the question time that there is this tension in the Christian's heart between being told to pray for our enemies and love our enemies in the here and now whilst at the same time knowing on that final day of judgment it will be great news to see to see God's enemies defeated to see God's enemies defeated I'm not saying this is an easy tension to have but it is one that God wants us to have because on that final day won't it be wonderful to see for example the enemies of sin of death of the devil defeated we all long for that day don't we when

the fight with sin will be over defeated at last it's mind blowing to know that in Christ we will have victory over death and rise again to new life it is wonderful to know that one day in the future the devil will be destroyed all our temptations and those battles will be finished it is good news to us that one day there will be victory over our enemies all our enemies all those who continue to set themselves up against God by persecuting God's people so we need to remember that God is telling us this in Obadiah first and foremost to give us hope amidst persecution to spur us on so that we don't give up in summary then we've seen the future is one which belongs to God it is one of comprehensive blessing it is one of victory over God's enemy three truths which God gives us about the future so we keep going amidst persecution to spur us on in the life of faith I'd like to finish with three quotes from saints from the New Testament who lived this life of faith before us three examples to us of those who had this future clearly in their minds the apostle Peter and after you've suffered for a little while the God of all grace who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ will himself restore confirm strengthen and establish you the apostle Paul for I'm already being poured out as a drink offering and the time of my departure has come I have fought the good fight I have finished the race I have kept the faith henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord the righteous judge will award to me on that day and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing and of course the Lord Jesus himself the founder and perfecter of our faith who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross despising the shame and is seated at the right hand of the throne of

[25 : 52] God now it's fitting that as we come to the end of Obadah so we come to fix our eyes on the Lord Jesus because ultimately Obadiah points to him Jesus is the one in whom all God's promises are fulfilled Jesus is the judge who will defeat all our enemies on the day of the Lord Jesus is the one in whom all the blessings of the new creation are found he is the one to which the whole world is heading the future belongs to him and one day Jesus Christ will return to bring in this glorious future when all the trials and sufferings and difficulties of this life will be gone forever God is saying keep trusting keep fighting keep living the life of faith and this glorious future with Jesus will be ours too let's pray together heavenly father we praise you for this glorious vision of the future and the spur it is to us now we praise you that the future belongs to you this wonderful certain future and all the suffering and persecution of this world will end praise you it's a future of such incredible blessing when we'll spend eternity enjoying this brand new perfect world with you and all your people praise you for the great victory that we will share with you on that final day over sin death the devil and all those that proudly oppose you and so we ask father that you would spur us on with these three truths this week admits any persecution we're facing now or that we'll go on to face please help us never to forget this glorious future of yours but rather would we draw on it for strength and fortitude in the

Lord Jesus to keep fighting the Christian fight and trusting in you and we ask it for Jesus sake Amen