

(1) Pride comes before a fall

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[0 : 0 0] As Simon said, our reading this morning is from the book of Obadiah. We're going to read verses 1 through to 4, and that can be found on page 933 of the Bibles.

Obadiah, starting at verse 1. The vision of Obadiah. Thus says the Lord God 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. At 21 verses, Obadiah is the shortest book in the Old Testament, but it's amazing how many glorious and humbling truths the Holy Spirit manages to fit into the prophecy.

[1 : 1 8] So, why don't I pray for us now, and ask God to unearth these truths for us, and enlighten our hearts with them. Let's pray together. Father God, we thank you for your word to us.

We thank you that you give all of Scripture to us, as a lamp to our feet, and a light to our path. And so we ask, Father God, that you would speak to us now from the prophet Obadiah.

Please show us your glory, and humble us before you. In Jesus' name, Amen. Now, whenever we come up against evil in the world, it's natural for us to want justice to be done.

For evil to be paid for, for wrongs, that is, to be righted, for truth and justice to prevail. But how can we be sure that justice will be done?

How can we be sure that perpetrators of evil will be brought to account? When we read on the front pages of three-year-old Madeleine McCann, kidnapped in Portugal, we desperately want the abductor to be caught, for the girl to be found and reunited with her parents.

[2 : 3 9] But what if they're not? What then? Where's the justice? What answer then is there for the devastated parents of Madeleine McCann?

When we hear of the oppressive regimes going on in Zimbabwe, North Korea, the poverty, the murders, the deceit, and lies, how can we be sure that these dictators will be brought to account for their actions?

It seems for all intents and purposes that they're getting away with it right now. What sort of message does that send out to the people living under these tyrants?

What sort of message does it send out to them? We want justice to be done, but how can we be sure of it? And of course, the nearer the injustices are to ourselves, the more pertinent this question becomes, especially that as Christians, we are not protected from the injustices of this world.

You might have read of the three Turkish Christians murdered the week before last for printing copies of the Bible. According to the Barnabas Fund website, 200 million Christians around the world are daily living in fear of either death, rape, kidnap, violence, jail, or total segregation simply for following Jesus Christ.

[4 : 0 0] Where's the justice, they might ask? And if these opening examples are all feeling just a little bit out there, well, I'm sure all of us can testify to some mocking comments we've received to following Jesus, some job that was passed over us, some social gathering that we weren't invited to, purely because we're Christian.

The media in this country love to ridicule Christians, whilst other religions and spiritual beliefs seem to go untouched. Where is the justice in that?

All of us want justice to be done, but how can we be sure of it? Well, it's just this sort of question that was on the lips of God's people who were suffering in terrible justices at the time Obadiah spoke this prophecy, which makes this little book from the Old Testament so relevant for us today.

It's probably our known part of the Bible. But you see, in many ways, the world has not changed since the time of Obadiah. 2,600 years may have passed, but there's nothing new under the sun.

Human nature hasn't changed, so there'll always be evil, injustices in the world. But marvelously, God hasn't changed. Which means what we learn about God back here in Obadiah, we learn about God today.

[5 : 1 9] If God is sovereign over the world and the nations back here, then God is sovereign over the world today. If he's committed to justice back here with his people, he's committed to justice today.

It's true for everything that we learn about God in the book of Obadiah, because the God of the Old Testament is the God of today. This is why Obadiah is so refreshingly relevant and why all of the Bible is always relevant to us.

Now, that said, it's always important whenever we come to a book of the Old Testament to ask where we are along the Bible timeline. Where are we in the unfolding plan of God? And for Obadiah, the answer is around 587 BC, a time when God's people were treated dreadfully by their brothers, turned enemies, the Edomites.

God's people at that time were under attack from a foreign nation, but rather than coming to their aid, the Edomites instead joined in with the attackers. And verses 10 to 14 list their treacherous and violent behaviour.

We'll look at this in two weeks' time. Looting, betrayal, mocking, and rejoicing in their ruin. The Edomites really kicked their brothers when they were down. And we can only imagine the crime for justice to be done from the people of God.

[6 : 3 7] For God to do something about the evil behaviour of their so-called brothers. for the Edomites to be brought to justice. Well, it's into this context that God speaks to his people through the prophet Obadiah, and he reassures them in two main ways in the book.

In verses 1 to 16, God declares that he will justly judge Edom, as he will all his enemies. And in verses 17 to 21, God promises to righteously restore his people.

So these are the two main themes that will run throughout the book of Obadiah. The Just Judgment of Edom and the Righteous Restoration of God's People. And the majority of the prophecy concerns the judgment, so we'll be spending the first three weeks looking at that before finally turning to verses 17 to 21 for the final talk.

So, for the rest of this morning, we're focusing on verses 1 to 4. As we see God pronounce his judgment on Edom, whilst at the same time exposing why this judgment was coming.

And if you turn to the back of the service sheet, you'll see those are the two points. The reassurance of God's judgment and the reason for God's judgment.

[7 : 53] First then, the reassurance of God's judgment. Verse 1, the vision of Obadiah. We know very little about the prophet Obadiah. There are 11 other Obadias mentioned in the Old Testament.

But assuming this prophecy is written soon after the events of 587 BC, then none of them correspond to Obadiah the prophet. All we have is his name, which means servant of the Lord, and we have his prophecy.

A prophecy which is clearly not his own message, but a message from God. Verse 1, Thus says the Lord God concerning Edom. Now, straight up, this would have been a reassurance to God's people.

There they are experiencing one of the worst days in their history at the hand of the Edomites. But God is not silent to what is going on. He has answers for them. He has something to say to his people about Edom.

And this should be a reassurance for us too because God always has something to say to us no matter the situation we are facing. Of course, God does not speak to us today through visions or prophets as he did back then.

[8 : 58] Now that the canon of scripture is complete, if we want to hear God speak today, it is to the Bible that we go. That is where we meet, where God meets us, where we're at. So what did God say to his people about Edom?

Verse 1 again, 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.

So we see here God has sounded the battle cry. War against Eden has been declared and already God is rounding his troops for this battle. What will be the outcome?

Verse 2, Behold, I will make you small among the nations. You, Edom, shall be utterly despised. God will judge Edom.

Small and despised they will be. And so in verses 1 and 2, what God is doing is he's announcing his judgment on Edom and in so doing, reassuring his people that justice will be done.

[10 : 04] The atrocities Edom have committed have not gone unnoticed by God. He will bring Edom to account and so justice is certainly on its way because God's judgment is on its way.

Now this was a reassurance to his people then and I hope this is a reassurance for us today because judgment is a word we don't like to hear often. Judgment is perhaps a concept we shy away from and are sometimes embarrassed of as Christians.

But as we said at the start, we've all experienced that cry for justice in our hearts. We all know the horror of reading about some murder, some affair, some scandal, where people's lives have been left ruined, families destroyed.

We long for justice to be done. That is part of what it means to be human. We long for wrongs to be righted. And as we read of God's judgment against Edom, we can have absolute confidence that God is not indifferent to sin.

The God of Obadiah is the God of today, which means God will right every wrong committed in this universe, particularly evil against his own people.

[11 : 21] You see, God's judgment assures us that justice will be done. And so from this angle, God's judgment is a wonderful thing. Could be you haven't thought of it that way, but put it another way, if there were no judgment day, no day of reckoning, well there'll be times when there is no justice.

And what a depressing world that would be. This was made painfully clear to Joe and I this week whilst we watched Woody Allen's film Match Points. I will spare you the details, but the point is well made by him that if there is no judgment day, if there isn't a day of reckoning, then justice is not a certainty of life.

For Woody Allen, justice is purely down to chance. Some people get caught, some people don't, and if you're lucky, you can escape justice. Without a day of reckoning, it is possible, in this film anyway, to get away with murder and adultery, lies and betrayal.

And it was a pretty depressing film, which is why verses 1 and 2 really are so wonderful, because they assure us the world is not like this. They assure us that justice will be done because God's judgment is coming.

It doesn't matter how lucky you are in this world. God's judgment is certain. I will make you small. And God has spoken, and what God says happens.

[12 : 43] Because God's judgment is certain, justice is certain. God's judgment assures us that the abductor of Madeleine McCann will be brought to justice. God's judgment assures us that oppressive dictators will be brought to account for their evil actions.

And God's judgment is something that actually we can long for and rejoice in as Christians when we see people, governments, nations, seeming to get away with such wrongdoing.

When we ourselves face injustice personally, whatever it may be. Betrayal, being lied to, being lied about, being scammed, being mugged or burgled, being ignored or neglected or abused.

We can hold on to and rejoice in the righteous judgment of God. Because God's judgment reassures us, justice certainly will be done. So that's the first thing that Obadiah is showing us, the reassurance of God's judgment.

Well let's turn now to verses 3 and 4 as we see why this judgment of God is coming specifically upon Edom. What was the underlying problem in their hearts?

[13 : 55] Secondly then, the reason for God's judgment. Have a look at verse 3. 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? In short, Edom is a proud nation.

The root cause of their problem is proud. When you think more highly of yourself than you should, pride is exhorting yourself to position that you don't belong. And we can see this to be just the case with Edom.

High up in their lofty dwelling, they think they're above danger. In the clefts of their rock, they think they're untouchable, impregnable, invincible. And so they tortenly ask, who will bring us down?

Who will bring us mighty Edom to the grounds? And the answer in their minds of course is no one, no one can touch us. But pride is deceptive. Because if there's one thing that pride does not factor into the equation, it is God.

[15 : 01] Either pride says there is no God, only myself, and are I great compared to others? Or pride says, well there is a God, but I'm just fine without his help or interference. I don't need God. But ultimately, this attitude of heart will bring you face to face with God.

Because he does exist. And Edom are nothing without God. You see, whether intended or not, pride is ultimately a challenge against God himself. And that's where the problem begins for Edom.

As one commentator puts it, the Edomites question, who will bring us down, is intended as rhetorical and thus unanswerable. But where the Edomites expected an odd silence, what they got was the thunder voice of God.

Verse 4. 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. Who will bring you down?

I will, says God. And verses 3 and 4 really expose the folly of pride, don't they? There are the Edomites boasting in their nest set among the stars, forgetting that God has put all the stars there in the first place and can soon bring them down.

[16:15] They might be soaring aloft like an eagle, thinking they're untouched from the nations, not realising that God is sovereign over the nations. God is the God of verse 1 who can manoeuvre the nations around.

As simply as we do, perhaps pawns on a chessboard. They have totally forgotten their place before God. They don't realise how small they are compared to him. Pride of their heart has deceived them.

I will bring you down. I remember a time when I was very young, proudly boasting before my parents that I was faster than them, that I could run away from them, that no one could catch me.

And as soon as I was saying this, my dad quickly got up from the chair and I tried to leg it away from him as fast as my legs would carry me. But I think after three of his large steps, he was on top of me and brought me firmly to the ground.

It was ridiculous to think that I was better than my dad. And that's a little picture of what is going on here. Because it's ridiculous for Eden to think that they are better than God, their maker and the creator of the universe.

[17:22] You see, this is why pride is so deceptive. Because it makes you think you are better than you really are. And the more proud you are, the more superior you think you are than everyone else.

And the closer actually you set yourself up against God. But in God, you come up against an adversary infinitely superior to you in every way. And when you set yourself against God in pride, well, there's only one winner.

I will bring you down, says God. The reason for judgment is pride. Again, this would have served as a reassurance to the Israelites that Eden would be brought down despite their seeming apparent security and invincibility.

see, it doesn't matter how safe and secure someone looks, if they are proud, God will bring them down. It was true for Edom then. It is true for any proud nation or institution today.

But what I find striking about these verses is that although God is clearly giving this prophecy for the benefit of his people, being as it is in the Bible, he is also addressing the Edomites.

[18:32] He says to them, you shall be made small. The pride of your heart has deceived you. I will bring you down. And surely this is a warning to anyone here today who has the same anti-God attitude as the Edomites.

You see, we can easily be tempted to think that we are safe and secure in our five-bedroom houses with our impregnable pension schemes, with our solid salaries. It's easy to be tempted to think life is just fine, that you will be safe on judgment day, perhaps because of some merit you performed in your life.

But these verses teach us that pride of the heart deceives, that we are not safe in and of ourselves. Because as surely as God brought Edom down, so God will bring any proud person down.

I mean, who has heard of Edom today? No one will be planning a holiday to Edom this summer, it no longer exists. The reason for judgment is pride.

But as we think of God's judgment on the proud, we mustn't fall into the trap of becoming proud ourselves. Indeed, one of the main reasons why the people of Israel were being attacked by a foreign nation in the first place was because of their own proud self-righteousness.

[19 : 53] Now, as God exposes the pride in the hearts of the Edomites, we are all made well aware of the pride that still resides in our own hearts. I'm sure that each one of us can think of a time this week, perhaps even this morning, when we have secretly gloated at being better than someone else, whether it's getting a better mark at school, whether it's winning that business deal over someone else, having better behaved, more talented children.

So often we say things, don't we, that make us sound better than we really are. We put others down, we snigger at someone else's mistake. We love to consider ourselves better than others, more mature a Christian, more superior because of all we're doing at church.

Our hearts can be very dark places, full of pride. And so as we see the reason for God's judgment being pride, and therefore the judgment we deserve for our pride, so we're also reminded of the judgment we have been rescued from.

For 550 years after the prophecy of Obadah, we know that God himself came to earth, injured the person of Jesus Christ. And if there was one person who had any right to lord it over us, to exhort themselves over others, it was the Lord Jesus.

Yet how did he live his life? Well, Philippians 2 tells us, though Jesus was in the form of God, he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, and he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

[21 : 32] Jesus didn't lord it over others. Jesus lived a life of perfect humility, the opposite of pride. And this life of humility led ultimately to his death, a death which the New Testament tells us was on our behalf.

Because on the cross, Jesus took the judgment we deserve for our pride. He died in our place so that we could be forgiven for all the pride that is in our hearts. And so have our relationship with God restored.

And so as we partake in the Lord's Supper, as we'll do so in a moment, we are reminded that the only remedy for a proud heart is the gospel of humility. It was the cross of Christ, wasn't it, that rescued us from God's judgment?

It was the cross of Christ that broke our proud hearts. Christ has and brought us to our knees in adoration of the Lord Jesus. And it's only the cross of Christ that will continue to chip away at the pride in our hearts and keep us totally reliant on the Lord Jesus and all that he has done for us.

Well, let's pray together now. Amen.

[22 : 51] Heavenly Father, we praise you that you are a God who judges nations. We praise you that because of your coming judgment, we can be assured that justice will one day be done.

But as we see the reason for your judgment on Eden being pride, so we are reminded of the pride in our own hearts. And so we thank you afresh this morning for the Lord Jesus and his death for us.

We thank you for rescuing us from the judgment to come. And we ask, Father God, that by your Holy Spirit, you would help us to cling to the cross of the Lord Jesus and to humbly trust him more and more.

And we ask it for his sake. Amen.