

The Rise and Fall of a Nation

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[0 : 00] Well, it's good to laugh in church, and I'm glad we had a good laugh, because as you can see, the book of Obadiah does not lend itself easily to the comedic treatment.

So we are looking at the entire book, and you don't realize it yet, but I'm doing you a huge favor. Reason being that you'll get to heaven one day, and Obadiah's going to be wandering around saying hi to you, and his first question's going to be, so did you read my book?

Because, you know, he'll be feeling a bit insecure, because it's the shortest book in the Bible, you know, and you can say to him, yes, yes I did. And you can say, it's all about reversal. It's all about reversal.

Now, that's not the only reason we're looking at it tonight. Mainly, it's actually got this incredible sort of continuity of themes with Ruth, which we've been looking at for the last four weeks for the new folks. So Ruth was about the sovereignty of God, which, as you can hear, Obadiah is about.

Ruth was about obedience and faithfulness. When things are going sideways, Obadiah was written to a people living in exile. So sovereignty, obedience, and thirdly, reversal, okay?

[1 : 15] And the way it plays out in Obadiah is the opposite to the way it plays out in Ruth. And Ruth, you remember, we learned about this woman called Naomi, who was right down here in terms of power and security, and God, you know, God lifted her up.

And Obadiah is about this people who believe themselves to be way up here, and God pulled them down. So it's reversal in reverse, I guess.

And these books, side by side, just offer this great example of the biblical principle of how God exalts the humble and pulls down the proud.

So we've had four weeks on exalting the humble, and we're going to just have one week on bringing down the proud. When you heard it read, you probably thought it's not very intuitive, but it's actually not too bad.

I just have to, once I've broken it up for you, you'll see, actually, you know what? This makes a lot of sense, and it's actually quite logical. So we've got sort of like three or four sections we're going to look at here. The first section is verses one to five.

[2 : 25] First verse there. Thus says the Lord God concerning Edom. So who are these guys, Edom? Well, Edom is a place, the Edomites are people group. Abraham had Isaac. Isaac married Rebekah.

They had two kids, twins. You remember in Genesis 25, it says God said that they had, she had like two nations in her belly, and it was true.

Jacob and Esau were the kids. They had some problems, and they went on and became the ancestors of two people groups. Jacob became who?

Israelites. Esau, what people group? Edomites, good guess. You knew that, Kathy Ross, I know that. So that's sort of the history. These two groups of people had some trouble with each other, okay?

Right up until the times of Jesus, the Edomites were against the people of God, or working against the people of God. Saul, David, Solomon, they all fought the Edomites. And Herod, who tried to kill the baby Jesus, who eventually crucified the baby Jesus, those guys were actually descended from the Edomites.

[3 : 34] So that's Edom. And what does God say about them? Well, he says, I'm going to bring them down. I'm going to bring them down. I'm going to destroy them.

And what's the major sort of acute presenting sin that comes up? What's the first thing Obadiah mentions? In verse 3, you see, it's pride.

Pride. I can't think of another sin that keeps us from God more than the sin of pride. We've probably met proud and arrogant people in our life, right?

And their big problem is not that they're just annoying, okay? Their big problem is they have a skewed version of reality. Pride makes people think that they are self-sufficient, that they have everything under control, that they are invincible.

And in a universe under the lordship of God, that's just, I mean, it's silly, really, isn't it? So verse 3 says that their pride deceived them. Exactly what does that mean there?

[4 : 34] How did their pride deceive them? What were they proud of? What was their great achievement that they thought, yeah, whoo, Edomites, you know? They had this, the clue is here in verse 3, I think, here.

You who live in the clefts of the rock in your lofty dwelling, you say in your heart, who will bring me down to the ground? That's a reference to this fortress that they had. It was like this impregnable fortress.

It was like this, if you imagine two cliffs, jaggedy cliffs right beside each other and a thin little kind of causeway down, causeway is not the right word, but like a path, one horse wide path that led to their fortress.

And you've actually seen this fortress. You know this fortress. You've seen it. Have you guys seen those archaeological documentaries, who's Indiana Jones? Have you seen that guy in his fact-based movie things?

Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom. Do you know the path that leads to the big thing in the Temple of Doom, right? And the path, that's where the Edomites lived.

[5 : 43] So it was incredibly, incredibly secure. And so their position sort of gave them a sense of being completely invulnerable, right?

Untouchable. Soaring like eagles, it says in the passage. Their pride made them think they could oppose God's people without any pushback. Cause you know, we're living in the cliffs, baby. You know, try and try and get at us. There's no way. There's no way. Now Obadiah makes it very clear that if you reject God, if you oppose God and you keep doing it your whole life, at some point God is going to reject you.

And there is nothing that can stop that from happening. Verse 4. Though your nest is set among the stars, from there I will bring you down, declares the Lord. Okay, so that's the first section.

We've been introduced to these Edomites who are a prideful people and who it would seem they are due for a comeuppance. Okay, section 2.

[6 : 44] That's kind of like if you're looking in your Bibles, they're kind of verses 5 to 9-ish there. This section is all about how far the Edomites will be brought down, the magnitude of the judgment.

And it's meant to convey the sense of a complete reversal, a complete turnaround from their current situation. In verse 5, we see that Obadiah says thieves are going to come at night and they're going to take everything, not just the high dollar items.

I know a couple of people have been burgled recently and the thieves went straight to laptops and gold. In this scenario, it's like we're taking everything. Second half of verse 5.

If your grape gatherers come to you or they're not leaving, there's going to be not even scraps in your fields left. You're going to have nothing. Verse 7. Your allies are going to turn against you.

Verse 8. Your smart guys, your wise men, gone.

Verse 9. Your mighty men, your army dismayed. Your armies will fail you. So you're going to go from way up here to way down here. A complete reversal of fortunes.

[7 : 50] Right. Let me take a two minute break and step back from the text for just a moment. Because I am conscious that we might have visitors here.

People who are exploring Christianity. Hoping that it is not the fear-mongering, intolerant, fire-and-brimstone cult betrayed in the media.

If you are visiting and you're not a Christian, but you're kind of curious about it, I know this sermon so far feeds into every caricature of Christianity you have. The angry God judging the bad people.

Folks, there is no way to get around the message of this passage. It is about a God who was judging these people. And I know for some people the idea of judgment.

Judgment day, for example, can sound silly or unfair or offensive. So before I move on, I want to take just like a minute here just to make a case for judgment. And the idea of a judgment day or the day of the Lord.

[8 : 50] Okay. So first, I have two points. First point. I am sure you desire justice in the world, right? I think the universe is embedded with this innate desire for it.

You hate it when murders go unsolved. Dictators drunk with power, killing their people. Syria, right? You watch that. I get angry. I just think, somebody. I wish they'd just, ah, come on.

Whoever's doing this, let's hold them responsible. It pains us to know that a lot of evil actually goes unchecked in the world, unpaid for. It stinks, right? And so this is my first point.

You desire justice. Second point. The desire for justice is only satiated when there is judgment. Justice looks like someone judging.

It looks like someone saying, this is wrong. There is a price to pay for that. It's not a price to pay for that. So can I just ask that you would try and get past the baggage attached to the word judgment and see the rightness of it.

[9 : 55] That's why I think it's silly when people accuse Christianity of making God too judgmental and when he's just kind of, you know, lovey, you know. I think a loving God does not ignore injustice.

It's a loving God who sees evil, calls it for what it is, and being God has the moral authority to declare a judgment. The alternative is a God who does not judge.

I mean, to me, that's unthinkable. You know, that's abhorrent. The God that turns the blind eye. The God who, you know, doesn't want to get involved. The God that doesn't want people to think badly of him, right?

That's God minus judgment, and that just sounds ridiculous. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, World War II Holocaust, the world was faced with this mammoth task of how do we seek justice for a crime which is unfathomable?

And on such a massive scale. And so the IMT, which is the International Military Tribunal held at Nuremberg, Germany, attempted to deal with the whole thing on a legal basis.

[11 : 01] That's the Nuremberg trials. You've probably heard of those. Let me read the opening words from the prosecution. It's Mr. Justice Jackson. May it please your honors.

The privilege of opening the first trial in history for crimes against the peace of the world imposes a grave responsibility. The wrongs which we seek to condemn and punish have been so calculated, so malignant, and so devastating that civilization cannot tolerate their being ignored because it cannot survive their being repeated.

And this is the bit I like. That four great nations flushed with victory and stung with injury stay the hand of vengeance and voluntarily submit their captive enemies to the judgment of the law is one of the most significant tributes that power has ever paid to reason.

Walking away from a desire for revenge and believing that a higher moral authority can take care of that for us.

That's what the Nuremberg trials were about. And that's simply what judgment is about. There's more to it than that, but you know what I'm saying, right?

[12 : 18] It's a belief that a higher moral authority will take responsibility for the injustice in the world and will judge perfectly. So the Christian belief in judgment is not base, it's not a product of thoughtless emotion, far from being silly or wrong-headed.

I think the Christian belief in judgment is actually very, very reasonable. Okay, that's the end of the intermission. Let's get back to the text. Section three. This is important.

At this stage, we know that these Edomites, they have an arrogance attached to their belief that they're untouchable and God's going to judge them and it's going to go really badly for them.

So why is he doing that? That seems like that's a reasonable question, right? What have these guys done? In 587 BC, Israel was overrun and ransacked by the Babylonians.

And verses 10 to 14 talk about that. And this is what they've done. Instead of helping the Israelites, the Edomites, who were like a brother nation to them, instead of helping them, the Edomites, verse 13 tells us, they went in and actually looted the city.

[13 : 28] Verse 14, it says they killed Israelites who were trying to escape the Babylonian attack. Rounded up ones they didn't kill and handed them over. And of course, living in their fortress, the Edomites did this, believing they could just get away with it.

Because they're living in the collapse. They're living in the temple of doom, man. Like, who can get in there, right? Okay, section four, the final section.

Verses 15 to 21. This is very full on, the first part of it. Second part of it is wonderful. So first, the full on part. Verse 15, For the day of the Lord is near upon all nations.

As you have done, it shall be done to you. For as you have drunk on the holy mountain, so all the nations shall drink continually. They shall drink and swallow, and shall be as though they had never been.

Now that second part doesn't sound too bad, doesn't it? It sounds like judgment looks like the Edomites getting really drunk. Drinking in the Bible is often seen as a picture of judgment, though. To help you see what they're getting at here, let me read Jeremiah 25, 15.

[14:39] Thus the Lord, the God of Israel, said to me, Take from my hand this cup of the wine of wrath, and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it.

They shall drink and stagger and be crazed because of the sword I am sending among them. So it's not talking about getting drunk. It's talking about drinking God's judgment and anger, and this drink that gets, it's inside you.

It's in your gut. That's the imagery. The sword of God's judgment gets you deep inside. The result is not a massive hangover. It's verse 16. It's you shall be as though you have never been.

The result is destruction. And verse 15 also tells us that it's not just Edom that Obadiah is talking about.

For the day of the Lord is near upon all nations. The judgment that's heaped on Edom is coming to everyone. Everyone will face God one day and make an account for how they have lived their lives. It's called the day of the Lord here.

[15:37] Other places it's called, you know, you probably refer to as judgment day. It's in God's planner. It's going to happen, and you cannot escape it. Except for verse 17.

And this is the comforting part. Verse 17. But in Mount Zion, there should be those who escape. In God's plan, whenever he judges, there has always been a place of safety.

In Noah's days, it was the ark, right? It was this object. In this word here, in Obadiah, it's a place. It's a physical spot. It's Mount Zion.

Today, it's not a place or an object. Obviously, these things point to something, right? And they're pointing to a person. Our escape today is a person. It's Jesus. It's Jesus who is our escape, who is our safety.

And he's our escape because all of our sin and selfishness and anger, the anger that those things deserve, Jesus drank that cup 2,000 years ago on the cross.

[16:42] And you've probably heard this reference to a cup before in relation to Jesus, haven't you? In the Garden of Gethsemane, right? It says in Matthew 26. And going a little further, he, that's Jesus, fell on his face and prayed, saying, My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.

Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will. The cup that Jesus says, if it's possible to let this pass from me, the cup is the cup of God's anger and God's judgment.

So that for those who trust in him on the day of the Lord, on judgment day, instead of judgment, there will be forgiveness. Instead of destruction, there will be healing and rebuilding and remaking. And I say that last bit because of the end of the passage, from 17 onwards all the way through to 21. See, it's not just a reversal of fortunes for Edom, right, who are way up here being pulled down. It works in the opposite direction for the people of God being pulled up. You see 17 and 21, you see all those place names, right? These places represent these four points of a sort of a compass.

[18:01] So it's saying people of God, instead of being in exile, having nothing, being a captive people, this is all going to be yours. It's all going to be yours. And of course, it's a picture, right?

Obadiah is pointing to the future, far beyond this little Middle Eastern drama here. He's pointing to you and your relationship with God and to all of God's people, pointing to the hope we can have on judgment day.

A time of escape and rebuilding and remaking and renewing and healing. I have two points to finish. First point, if you are here and you are not a Christian, and this sounds really heavy to you, but you love this idea of forgiveness, you know you need a weight lifted from your heart, you know the world is not in great shape and needs to be remade, the thing that is going to keep you from that is mentioned way back in verse 2.

It's pride. Pride will keep you from God. Pride is a misplaced trust in your own goodness.

Pride lies to you and it says, you know what, I am good enough to experience this. I'm good enough, God's going to like me, I'm in. I'm in, not the bad people. I'm in, I'm good, right? It is a misplaced trust, friend.

[19 : 40] It's misplaced because our trust should not be in our goodness, but in the goodness of Christ and God's grace. So if you're here and you're not a Christian, mate, don't let pride, don't let pride get in the way of you missing this.

And you can talk to me about this afterwards. I'd love to explain it more to you. Two, if you are here and you're a Christian and you want to know what's encouraging in this for me, what helps me live, what's going to help me tomorrow, this week at work, school, in retirement, wherever you are in life, you know?

Folks, we live in a context where the story of modern history is a story of the strong and the powerful and the glamorous. And it is hard being a Christian sometimes. We can feel small. The church can look rather unimpressive in comparison to the powerful institutions in the world. But this passage teaches us that it's actually, it's God's kingdom that is unshakable. It's God's people who will ultimately be lifted up.

And these impregnable fortresses of huge companies or cultural idols and stuff, these things will be stubble. God's people will be lifted up because we have humbled ourselves and put our faith in what Christ has done, not in what we have achieved.

[21 : 03] But now, before that day, your values, right, they're going to bump up against the world, right? They're going to bump up against it. And we can be made to feel foolish or at the very least misunderstood.

So what makes it, I'm finishing on this, what makes it plausible for us to live as exiled people in the world today?

Well, according to Obadiah, it is this great hope we have in judgment. In Obadiah, it's judgment that facilitates the great reversal we hope for, the great healing we need.

And we, God's people, can go through judgment and experience this great reversal, not because we've trusted it in ourselves, but because we have trusted in God's grace, which is always there for the asking.

Folks, we start next week looking at the Gospel of Mark. And if you don't understand God's grace and what Christ has done and why he came here, well, we're going to have a lot of time in Mark to talk about that.

[22 : 10] So we'll see you next week.