

## THE MINOR PROPHETS – THIS IS OUR GOD

I'm Still Here!

Today we come to the book of Obadiah. Obadiah is the shortest book in the Old Testament, and probably one we rarely, if ever, read. Truth is, we know very little about Obadiah, other than he wrote the book that bears his name. We have no idea who he was. The Old Testament names at least twelve Obadiah's, but scholars argue none of those twelve is the one who wrote the book! It turns out that Obadiah was a common name in ancient times.

We have no real idea when Obadiah wrote his book either. From the details in the text it could be as early as 850BC, or as late as 312BC, depending on which events in Jerusalem he is describing.

Truth is, we might know very little about who wrote this book, or when it was written, but this shortest book in the Old Testament packs a punch. Its message is powerful and important. It was for the people to whom it was written, and, if we are listening, it is for us today.

It may well be that Obadiah was writing to God's people in the early years after the exile – that is, in the early years after Jerusalem was destroyed by King Nebuchadnezzar.

Exile, for the people of Judah, meant that it had all gone terribly wrong. Exile, for both Israel and Judah meant no land of their own and no king on the throne. Exile was not how this story was supposed to go. Exile meant God had abandoned his people. Exile was hard and challenging and bewildering. Exile was a place in which it was hard to find hope.

Perhaps, for some of us, exile is something we are, in some way, familiar with. Perhaps the feeling of being abandoned by God. Perhaps the sense of a great distance between ourselves and God. Perhaps the feeling that, whatever his promises, we have been forgotten by God. Perhaps the belief that we tried really hard, but it's all gone wrong anyway.

Friends, hang in there this morning, because it might just be that God has something he wants to speak to you. I want to invite you to hold the words of a song we sometimes sing in your hearts and minds as we go through this time.

We sometimes sing:

'There is an endless song, echoes in my soul,  
I hear the music ring.

And though the storms may come,

I am holding on, to the rock I cling.'

I think that's what Obadiah might be saying to people who are bewildered, confused, struggling and in exile. Obadiah sings one song – a difficult song, but all the way through there is another song, very faintly being sung, one that began long before and yet will be heard long after the song he is singing ceases.

<sup>1</sup> The vision of Obadiah.

This is what the Sovereign LORD says about Edom—

We have heard a message from the LORD:

An envoy was sent to the nations to say,  
"Rise, let us go against her for battle"—

<sup>2</sup> "See, I will make you small among the nations;  
you will be utterly despised.

<sup>3</sup> The pride of your heart has deceived you,  
you who live in the clefts of the rocks  
and make your home on the heights,  
you who say to yourself,

'Who can bring me down to the ground?'

<sup>4</sup> Though you soar like the eagle  
and make your nest among the stars,  
from there I will bring you down,"

declares the LORD.

<sup>5</sup> "If thieves came to you,  
if robbers in the night—

oh, what a disaster awaits you!—

would they not steal only as much as they wanted?

If grape pickers came to you,

would they not leave a few grapes?

<sup>6</sup> But how Esau will be ransacked,  
his hidden treasures pillaged!

<sup>7</sup> All your allies will force you to the border;  
your friends will deceive and overpower you;

those who eat your bread will set a trap for you,  
but you will not detect it.

<sup>8</sup> “In that day,” declares the LORD,  
“will I not destroy the wise men of Edom,  
those of understanding in the mountains of Esau?

<sup>9</sup> Your warriors, Teman, will be terrified,  
and everyone in Esau’s mountains  
will be cut down in the slaughter. (Obadiah 1 v 1-9)

Obadiah’s book is written specifically to the nation of Edom, because Edom has helped in the destruction of Jerusalem. Edom has become an enemy of the people of God. Edom is a nation that bordered Judah to the south and east. It was on the east side of the river Jordan and extended south from Moab. To the east of Edom was desert.

Its capital city was Sela, which was renamed Petra (which you have probably heard of). Sela and Petra mean ‘rock’ a fitting name for the city. Part of Edom was good for cultivation and had trade routes passing through, but part of Edom, the central area, was red sandstone cliffs that were easily fortified. The nation of Edom thought itself secure because of these two things: it had good links with trade routes which made business good, and its capital was almost impregnable, hidden in the mountains and with only one-way in.

Because of this, Edom had become a proud nation, satisfied in its own power and might. It also, because of the trade routes that passed through its land, had lots of allies – because business is good for them all. Edom is proud and arrogant, a self-sufficient nation that has no need of God.

Verses 5 -9 speak of how, despite what it thinks of itself, Edom will fall, and nothing will be left.

Stay with it here, because there’s something else going on here too.

Because of the violence against your brother Jacob,  
you will be covered with shame;  
you will be destroyed forever.

<sup>11</sup> On the day you stood aloof  
while strangers carried off his wealth  
and foreigners entered his gates  
and cast lots for Jerusalem,  
you were like one of them.

<sup>12</sup> You should not gloat over your brother  
in the day of his misfortune,  
nor rejoice over the people of Judah  
in the day of their destruction,  
nor boast so much  
in the day of their trouble.

<sup>13</sup> You should not march through the gates of my people  
in the day of their disaster,  
nor gloat over them in their calamity  
in the day of their disaster,  
nor seize their wealth  
in the day of their disaster.

<sup>14</sup> You should not wait at the crossroads  
to cut down their fugitives,  
nor hand over their survivors  
in the day of their trouble. (Obadiah 1 v 10-14)

When Jerusalem was defeated, Edom stood and watched and even handed survivors over to the Babylonians. Why is Obadiah speaking of the fall of Edom in his book? And why would that be something helpful to the people of Judah in exile?

You may have spotted something in verse 10: 'Because of the violence against your brother Jacob.'

What's going on here has history. Jacob had a brother whose name was Esau. You may well know the story of Jacob and Esau, which we find in the book of Genesis. Isaac and Rebekah had two sons – Esau the elder, Jacob the younger twin. Isaac loved Esau, Rebekah loved Jacob. Rebekah helped Jacob steal his father's blessing that should have gone to Esau.

From then on there was enmity between Esau and Jacob. Jacob wrestled with God and was given the name Israel (which means one who struggles with God)... and from there the nation of Israel was born. Esau wanted to kill his brother for stealing his birth right, but never succeeded. Although they later negotiated a surface peace, it never lasted.

The descendants of Esau was Edom. Israel and Edom became enemies and Obadiah calls them out for being a godless nation and for watching on as Judah is defeated. What's happening in Obadiah is this: in verses 1-9 Obadiah

accuses Edom and then in verses 10-14 shows why what he says is valid and they will face God's judgement.

We, looking on now might wonder how this fits together. It obviously did for Obadiah. For Obadiah, the real sin of Edom was their pride. They believe they were a self-sufficient people, they needed no-one but themselves. They could trust in their allies with whom they could do business and keep close. They could trust in their wisdom. Interestingly Job's friend Eliphaz, who was apparently very wise, was a Temanite – that is, he was from Edom.

Edom has no need of God. Obadiah says all these things will fail: their wisdom will fail, their allies will prove treacherous and their defences will be overcome. Although spoken to Edom, this could be said to any nation of the world – we've seen that throughout history.

Then Obadiah speaks of the specific event in Judah's life – whenever it actually took place.

Jerusalem was overrun by enemies, and the people of Edom, who should have helped their brothers and sisters, actually did the opposite. They rejoiced in Judah's loss and participated in the looting. Obadiah is saying that the proof of the pride of Edom, is in the way they treated Judah.

Pride leads to a sense of superiority. When we feel superior, we look down on others and begin to mistreat them. Edom's mistreatment of the people of Jerusalem was proof of its pride, and God would no longer stand idly by.

Let's take a pause for a moment. There is a song, long in the history of men and women, of the effects of pride – superiority over others.

We might call it racism  
We might call it sexism  
We might call it white supremacy  
We might call it jobs for the boys  
We might call it discrimination  
We might call it the power of the rich  
We might call it inequality  
We might find it in the way nations are  
We might find it in the systems by which we live  
We might find it in the way organisations operate

We will find it wherever there is pride, and we become superior to others and look down on them.

Some of us are very familiar with this song. Perhaps, even now, some of us are living in the consequences of the pride of Edom. That certainly seems to be true for Judah as Obadiah writes his words. And Judah, in exile, is struggling with what happened to the song of God's love. And maybe you are too. I invite you to hang in there.

A word to any of us here today who might have a problem with pride. Edom stood aloof and would not help Judah (v11). We can be different and act in love. Edom showed no mercy but gloated over Judah's situation and helped their enemies (v12-14). We can be different and extend mercy to those in need.

"The day of the LORD is near  
for all nations.

As you have done, it will be done to you;  
your deeds will return upon your own head.

<sup>16</sup> Just as you drank on my holy hill,  
so all the nations will drink continually;  
they will drink and drink  
and be as if they had never been.

<sup>17</sup> But on Mount Zion will be deliverance;  
it will be holy,  
and Jacob will possess his inheritance.

<sup>18</sup> Jacob will be a fire  
and Joseph a flame;  
Esau will be stubble,  
and they will set him on fire and destroy him.

There will be no survivors  
from Esau."

The LORD has spoken.

<sup>19</sup> People from the Negev will occupy  
the mountains of Esau,  
and people from the foothills will possess  
the land of the Philistines.

They will occupy the fields of Ephraim and Samaria,  
and Benjamin will possess Gilead.

<sup>20</sup> This company of Israelite exiles who are in Canaan  
will possess the land as far as Zarephath;

the exiles from Jerusalem who are in Sepharad  
will possess the towns of the Negev.  
<sup>21</sup> Deliverers will go up on Mount Zion  
to govern the mountains of Esau.  
And the kingdom will be the LORD's. (Obadiah 1 v 15-21)

Edom will not last. This word from Obadiah is for Edom, but he also speaks to all nations, to all people. The nations have their song of their own might and power, but there is another song that can be heard but faintly, but that is being sung across the universe. The power of Edom and the nations cannot stand against the power of the God of Judah. There is another song about another kingdom being sung, even in Obadiah.

One day, centuries after Obadiah was written, two kings met. Both had a song to sing, both songs of a kingdom.

King Herod had heard about Jesus. His father King Herod the Great heard of him too. Herod the Great was so afraid of the birth of a king, he had all the baby boys under the age of two killed to protect his throne. Herod the Great was from Edom – he was an Edomite. One day his son, Herod Antipas, met Jesus. He was singing his song of his power and his might.

<sup>3</sup> So Pilate asked Jesus, “Are you the king of the Jews?”

“You have said so,” Jesus replied.

<sup>4</sup> Then Pilate announced to the chief priests and the crowd, “I find no basis for a charge against this man.”

<sup>5</sup> But they insisted, “He stirs up the people all over Judea by his teaching. He started in Galilee and has come all the way here.”

<sup>6</sup> On hearing this, Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean. <sup>7</sup> When he learned that Jesus was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time.

<sup>8</sup> When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see him. From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform a sign of some sort. <sup>9</sup> He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer. <sup>10</sup> The chief priests and the teachers of the law were standing there, vehemently accusing

him. <sup>11</sup> Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate. <sup>12</sup> That day Herod and Pilate became friends—before this they had been enemies.  
(Luke 23 v 3-12)

Herod thinks he has the power of life and death.

Jesus has a different song.

<sup>5</sup> When Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, “Here is the man!”

<sup>6</sup> As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw him, they shouted, “Crucify! Crucify!”

But Pilate answered, “You take him and crucify him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him.”

<sup>7</sup> The Jewish leaders insisted, “We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God.”

<sup>8</sup> When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid, <sup>9</sup> and he went back inside the palace. “Where do you come from?” he asked Jesus, but Jesus gave him no answer. <sup>10</sup> “Do you refuse to speak to me?” Pilate said. “Don’t you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?”

<sup>11</sup> Jesus answered, “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore, the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin. (John 19 v 5-11)

Jesus sings his song of love and gives himself to bring grace, mercy and freedom to all people. The song of God’s love sounds across the universe. It is the song of the kingdom of the heavens. It is the song of grace, mercy and hope. It is the song that reminds us we are not forgotten or abandoned. For the people of Judah, in exile, it was the song of hope and forgiveness.

There’s a song we sometimes sing, and can sing today, with these words.

I will lift my eyes, in the darkest night

For I know my Saviour lives

And I will walk with you



Knowing you'll see me through  
And sing the songs you give.

We get to choose which song we sing. The song of an earthly kingdom that will not last, or the song of God's great and magnificent love that sounds across the universe.

The song, as Obadiah reminds us, of the kingdom of the Lord.

Preached and Live streamed from Crawley Baptist Church, on Sunday 19<sup>th</sup>  
November 2023, by Rev. Ian Phillips.