

August 31, 2025

Return: God's Justice – A Warning and A Hope

Obadiah 1-2

Vernon Advent Christian Church

Introduction...

Earlier, for our call to worship, I read from Psalm 13:5-6. But, before we get there, vs. 1-4 of this same Psalm starts this way [Read Passage]. What is David looking for here? He is looking for justice isn't he? His enemies were triumphing over him, and he longed for justice. He wanted God to do something about it and, ultimately, he trusted that he would.

This same cry for justice and deliverance has been uttered in every generation since the fall of man. Even small children know something about justice, as one child cries out to Mom and Dad about their sibling, "That's not fair." It is right for us to cry out like David, because of who God is. He is good, righteous and just. And he is going to do something about it.

Our text today is from an OT prophet named Obadiah. Obadiah is the shortest book in the Old Testament, with only 21 verses, and at first glance, it doesn't look very exciting. It's a series of divine judgment poems set against the people of Edom, a nation neighboring Israel to the south on the other side of the Dead Sea. However, there's way more going on in this little book than you might think.

First of all, there is the back story. The people of Edom are unique from the other enemies of God mentioned in the Bible, and specifically in the Minor Prophets, because they shared a common ancestry with the Israelites. They both belonged to the family of Abraham. Abraham's son Isaac and his wife Rebekah had two sons, twins named Esau and Jacob. Genesis 25-27 tell the story of these brothers who, to say the least, had a tense relationship. Remember, Jacob took Esau's birthright and deceived their father to get his blessing and had to flee after Isaac died because Esau wanted to kill him. They seem to reconcile when Jacob returns home but that reconciliation is short lived.

The brothers both became known by different names, God changed Jacob's name to "Israel" after he wrestled with God on his way back home before meeting Esau. And Esau became known as "Edom," after the land where he and his descendants settled which comes from the same Hebrew word for "red" describing the red soil. These names eventually became the names of their families who replayed the same difficult relationship of their ancestors. And Israel and Edom had tremendous conflict, a "sibling rivalry" throughout the centuries despite their common heritage. The original Hatfield and McCoy's if you will.

That family bond, however, was betrayed and shattered during the tragic events of Jerusalem's fall, which we read about in 2 Kgs. 25. When the southern kingdom of Israel, Judah, was invaded and conquered by the Babylonians, the people of Edom apparently took advantage of them by plundering Israelite cities, capturing and even killing their captives. Now, in other prophetic books which we've looked at so far, Israel's other enemies were held accountable for such violence, and here Obadiah does the same with Edom.

And in this book, the pride and betrayal of the people of Edom become an example of the human condition and the ways in which we, as people, betray one another and harm God's good world. And it points to the fact that God will deal with the evil in our world and bring all nations into his Kingdom of peace. And so, this short book reveals the determination of God to bring about justice over all the earth. And in it, we get a glimpse of the hope for the future of Israel and us. If you are able, please stand with me as I read the Word of God found in the Book of Obadiah. And as you are standing, think about the fact that after I finish reading, we would have read one whole book of the Bible! [Read vs. 1-21]

The first thing we notice is that God is going to bring justice and his justice is given as a warning. Now, we have a similar situation here, as we have had in other books of the minor prophets, when we ask the question, "Who is Obadiah?" The OT lists about 12 different men by the name of Obadiah, but none of them seem to quite fit the bill. And so what do we know about this prophet? Well, the first four words in vs. 1, "The vision of Obadiah," that is all we get, that is his biography. We do know that his name means, "servant of Yahweh," but other than that, we know nothing about him.

But we do know, from vs. 1, the situation and the nation Obadiah wrote about, and that would be Edom, following their sin against the people of Judah that we talked about earlier. The main storyline in Obadiah breaks down into two parts. First, Edom had severely mistreated Israel so the Lord is pronouncing a judgment against them. And at the same time, the second part of the book gives hope to the people Israel who were crying out to God for justice.

The Lord calls for Edom's attention in vs. 2, "Behold!" Look. Listen. Edom thought they were great and mighty, but the Lord will bring them down, making them small, even utterly despised by other nations.

In vs. 3-4, Edom's pride makes them boast, "Who can defeat us?" We've seen this same pride in the powerful enemies of Israel as we've made our way through the prophets. This same language was used to describe the Assyrians, for instance, and this same pride is at the heart of every powerful nation throughout history who thinks that they endure by their own strength.

In our text, Edom had become self-deceived due to this pride. But God is going to humble them. All over the Scriptures we are told of the dangers of pride. One example, Proverbs 16:18, "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."

Even if Edom was a powerful nation, which in reality they were not, the Lord could and would humble them. We won't talk much more about pride and humility today, but let me say this. There is hardly a more destructive quality in our lives than pride. When we are proud and focused on ourselves, we will find ourselves in a battle with God, and we will not win.

James 4:6 says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." It will go better for us if we humble ourselves before the Lord, eventually, does it for us. Edom is just one example of God's opposition to pride and arrogance.

Now, in the first four verses, Obadiah has been speaking in the future tense. Judgment is coming for Edom. But notice as we get to vs. 5-7, he switches to past tense. Though judgment is still coming, apparently God had already begun his judgment on Edom.

God has already brought judgment on Edom from the hands of others as a warning of future judgment to come and it is complete and devastating.

Obadiah describes it with great detail. Edom has been and will continue to be plundered, destroyed, stolen from. They will be left with no gleanings from their fields. Their treasures will be taken. They will be driven to the border. They will be deceived by former allies, and caught in a trap. Edom will be completely humbled, crushed and defeated.

And the Lord asks a rhetorical question in vs. 8, "Will I not do this..." or, quite literally, "Can anyone stop me from accomplishing my will?" He promised he would humble them in their pride by sending nations to destroy them completely. And here, in vs. 8-9, he commits to bring their wise men and warriors low and put them all to death speak of their complete destruction.

In addition to their pride and arrogance we see in the these first few verses, the Lord lists more specific sins Edom committed against Israel in vs. 10 following. On the flipside, though it is not mentioned explicitly, Israel was being punished for their rebellion against the Lord.

We know this because part of the covenant God made with Israel was that if Israel walked by faith with the Lord, they would never be defeated by their enemies. But if Israel rejected the Lord, and turned to idols, then he would use their enemies as judgment against them.

And so, since Israel has been crushed by its enemies and taken off into captivity by the Babylonians, we know from other places in scripture that God himself has brought judgment upon Israel, using their enemies as his instruments.

However, Edom was violently wicked in their treatment of their "brothers," their fellow descendants of Abraham and Isaac. So the Lord is holding Edom accountable for their wickedness.

Vs. 18 tells us that God will eventually bring justice on Edom by using Israel as "a fire set to stubble." What a graphic description. Most of us have a burn pile somewhere on our property. And we stack brush and wood and other things that we want to burn up. But we don't light it every time do we. No, we wait until the time is right, and then we light the fire. And God says so it will be with Edom.

The interesting part here is that this is still future, as Israel has yet to possess the land of Edom. Nor will it happen before Christ returns, I believe, as these events described here are to coincide once again with the "Day of the Lord" judgment when Christ comes again to judge the living and the dead.

And the very last line of this section in vs. 18, "for the Lord has spoken," leaves no question about God's determination to make this all happen. Thus, God's justice serves a warning to those who remain enemies of God and reject his salvation.

But, in the last section, Obadiah brings hope to God's people who have been looking for God's justice and God's justice brings hope. We look back and remember that Israel has been punished by the Lord when these other nations destroyed them. And Edom has been and will be punished. But there is still hope for God's people. Someday, some future day, Israel is going to be raised back up.

Though the Lord had often spoken hard words of warning to Israel throughout their history because of their sin, here Obadiah speaks of a future glory for Israel. On some

future day, they will possess the land of all their enemies, and all of it will belong to the Lord as part of his kingdom. This apparently speaks of the coming of Christ's kingdom.

Vs. 21 seems to allude to this event. All over the Scriptures we are pointed to a day when Jesus will come back to earth literally and bodily, and he will set up his eternal kingdom on earth. And he will reign as King of kings and Lord of lords. He will bring his final judgment on all who have rejected him. But, he will bring reward and honor to all who have believed him.

And this "kingdom" shall be the Lord's. This last line of vs. 21 makes me think of Revelation 22:3-5, "No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever."

So what do we do with this short book found in the OT that speaks of God's justice for Israel against their enemy of Edom.

First of all, we need to realize that God is just and will deal with all sin. The truth is that he will judge all sin. Nothing will escape his eye. Hebrews 4:13 says, "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account." No sin ever committed escapes the eye of him to whom we must give account. It will either be paid for in the fires of hell or it has already been paid for on the cross. Either way, God's justice will prevail.

This truth of God's perfect justice is terrifying. And we are to be warned of his coming judgment. The warning comes to every one of us: God is perfectly just and righteous, and no sin will go unpunished. Romans 6:23 "The wages of sin is death..." Everyone should take notice of this truth and be warned. Someday everyone will stand alone before God.

But mercifully, there is an escape, only one way of escape, salvation is offered through faith in Jesus Christ, who died to be our substitute taking the penalty of our sin upon himself for those who believe. Romans 6:23 goes on to promise, "The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

This perfectly just God mercifully offers salvation through his son Jesus, the promised Messiah. That is the good news of the gospel. But God has provided no other way. That is the warning. God is just and will not overlook sin.

What should we do? Humble ourselves. Don't be like Edom. If you don't humble yourself before the Lord, he will eventually do it for you. Believe in, and receive, the Lord Jesus Christ. He has suffered the wrath of God for you. There is no greater gift. So the justice of God warns us.

But the justice of God also comforts us and brings us hope. And it does so in two ways. First, it comforts all of us who have believed in Jesus Christ because, again, Jesus took the condemnation we deserved. And so now, we have been set free.

Romans 5:1 says that we now have peace with God, we are no longer his enemies but his friends. Romans 8:1 says there is no more condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Romans 8:16 promises that we are no longer orphans but have been adopted as children of Almighty God. And Romans 8:38 says that nothing can separate us from the love

of God. What comfort and joy and hope we have in the promises of God that are ours in Christ Jesus.

A second way we can find comfort in God's justice is to know that all evil in our world will be dealt with in perfect justice someday. The injustices we experience personally and the injustices we see out in the world, that can drive us crazy with anger and hopelessness. But we can be comforted because it won't be much longer. We can find great comfort and hope in the fact that the Lord will make all things right in the end.

So we can cry out like David in Psalm 13, "How long, O Lord? How long before justice is done?," and know that our good and just God hears us and will, ultimately, bring justice. We are not guaranteed justice on the earth (though we should strive for that). But we are guaranteed justice before the throne of God someday soon. We can take comfort and find hope in this truth.

So, whether God is dealing with a nation like Edom or with people like us, he is the God of all justice. The God of perfect, all-seeing justice. By this we are warned. But by this we, who are in Christ, are comforted because in God's justice we find our hope.

The long-awaited hope of God, Jesus Christ, has come. And, he is coming again soon. Jesus himself said in Revelation 22:12, "Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done." Let's pray.

Benediction: "And the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To Him be the power for ever and ever. Amen." 1 Peter 5:10-11