

THE BOOK OF OBADIAH
Lesson 4, Chapter 1 Continued 3

In our study of the Book of Obadiah, we left off at verses 12-14, which lists 8 things that Edom ought not to have done (in retrospect) and ought not to do as regards their relationship with Israel. It is always my goal and hope to be able to make God's Word not just understandable, but also relatable to you. That is, too much (I'm afraid) the Bible characters and the words they said and the choices they made can seem so distant and out of touch with us that they attain vaporous, almost a mythological, status to us. We can't identify with them and it seems as though these folks are so extraordinary and one-of-a-kind that it is a rather hopeless endeavor to try to make them totally real and human let alone role models or, on the other end of the scale, having a character we ought to do our best not to adopt. But, real and human they were. Their thoughts, their lives, had the same sorts of concerns we all face. They had preferences, prejudices, weaknesses and strengths, failures and successes, good days and bad. Men had arguments with their wives, and children didn't always obey. It was the same for nations. Some had good leaders, others poor ones. And of course, their condition didn't remain static; the effectiveness and dedication of their leadership vacillated over time. These nations had eras of prosperity and of scarcity. Times of peace and times of war and societal discontent. It was no different for Edom, which is the main subject of Obadiah.

Edom was not always an enemy of Israel. But, in the sense of their legal, technical relationship with Yehoveh, God of Israel, they were entirely opposite that of Israel. God separated a people for Himself away from all other people and nations of the world, in order that they might serve Him and that His purposes would be brought about through them. It began with Abraham. God made a covenant with Abraham and so Abraham and his family became the first humans that we could call "God's covenant people". Abraham had children, and of those several children God chose Isaac to be the line of Abraham's descendants that would carry on the benefits and obligations of the covenant God made with Abraham. Isaac had children and the chosen from among them to carry on the covenant line of people was Jacob.

What is significant and pertinent to Obadiah is that Jacob's twin brother, Esau, was not included in that line of covenant people. I'll say this another way: Esau was destined to live outside of the covenant God made with Abraham, but Jacob, Abraham's grandson, inherited the covenant. Later on, Jacob gained the alternative name of Israel, and went on to found the nation of Israel. Esau went on to found the nation of Edom. Therefore, even though the descendants of the two brothers Israel and Edom didn't necessarily war with each other, they were usually not on friendly terms. And, the underlying reason for this never-ending friction all had to do with the matter of the covenant.

One of several of Yehoveh's intrinsic attributes is that He is not a God who unites; rather, He divides, elects, and separates. He divided the twin boys into two distinct groups with different destinies, and elected Jacob to carry on the covenant line. He then separated the two from one another. God is indeed a God of love; but that does make Him a compromiser nor does He act in a way we might say is even-handed. Lines are drawn, evil and good are defined, choices are made, duties and roles are assigned, and then boundaries between all these things are created. And except where He has made a way for one side to cross-over to the other, no mixing of His separated choices is allowed. For example, generally speaking Edom and Israel were not to mix including a prohibition of no marriage between the two groups. From a higher level, in order to understand this command not to mix, is that those who are in covenant with God are not to mix themselves with those who are not in covenant with Him. So, what of those who want to worship Israel's God and become part of the covenant people? God made a way for that to happen, and Ruth was one of the best examples of how this can occur. Ruth, a non-Israelite, crossed over by declaration and vow to her mother-in-law who was an Israelite.

CJB Ruth 1:16-17 ¹⁶ *But Rut said, "Don't press me to leave you and stop following you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God will be my God. ¹⁷ Where you die, I will die; and there I will be buried. May ADONAI bring terrible curses on me, and worse ones as well, if anything but death separates you and me."*

Upon the advent of Yeshua, a declaration and a vow still are the necessary way to cross over. Paul used the well-known metaphor of being grafted-in, and the

customary imagery of Israel as the Olive Tree, to explain this means of crossing over from non-covenant people to the covenant people.

CJB Romans 11:13-21 ***¹³ However, to those of you who are Gentiles I say this: since I myself am an emissary sent to the Gentiles, I make known the importance of my work ¹⁴ in the hope that somehow I may provoke some of my own people to jealousy and save some of them! ¹⁵ For if their casting Yeshua aside means reconciliation for the world, what will their accepting him mean? It will be life from the dead! ¹⁶ Now if the hallah offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole loaf. And if the root is holy, so are the branches. ¹⁷ But if some of the branches were broken off, and you- a wild olive- were grafted in among them and have become equal sharers in the rich root of the olive tree, ¹⁸ then don't boast as if you were better than the branches! However, if you do boast, remember that you are not supporting the root, the root is supporting you. ¹⁹ So you will say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." ²⁰ True, but so what? They were broken off because of their lack of trust. However, you keep your place only because of your trust. So don't be arrogant; on the contrary, be terrified! ²¹ For if God did not spare the natural branches, he certainly won't spare you!***

So, how is it that non-covenant people (gentiles) can join (be grafted into) the covenant people (Israel)? A declaration of trust in, and a vow to, the God of Israel. And since Messiah Yeshua's advent, this trust revolves around trust in Yeshua as God's Messiah as the One who has made the way for us to become part of the covenant...all of God's covenants... with all their blessings and obligations... by means of becoming part of the covenant people.

This matter of covenant is at the crux of what Obadiah instructs us. There are entirely different fates that await those in covenant with God versus those who are not. In Obadiah Israel represents the fate of those in covenant with God, and Edom the fate of those who are not. Therefore, if you believe and trust in the God of Israel and His Son Yeshua, Obadiah is about as pertinent to our personal fates as it gets.

With that understanding, let's look more closely at Obadiah verses 12 - 14, which states what non-covenant people ought **not** to do to the covenant people,

Israel. Or in modern terms, what Jordan and all gentile nations ought **not** to do to the nation of Israel.

CJB Obadiah 1:12-14 ***¹² You shouldn't have gloated over your kinsman on their day of disaster or rejoiced over the people of Y'hudah on their day of destruction. You shouldn't have spoken arrogantly on a day of trouble ¹³ or entered the gate of my people on their day of calamity- no, you shouldn't have gloated over their suffering on their day of calamity or laid hands on their treasure on their day of calamity. ¹⁴ You shouldn't have stood at the crossroads to cut down their fugitives or handed over their survivors on a day of trouble."***

In the early 6th century B.C., when Babylon invaded Judah and Edom aided Babylon, apparently Edom did all these things to Israel. Notice nothing here suggests that Edom actually took up arms and joined the attack. And while that is not to say that Edom never attacked Israel, nor will they in the future, nor that somehow them directly attacking Israel is OK because it is not specifically mentioned among these 8 "don'ts", in the scenario Obadiah is witness to, Edom is acting as an ally to Babylon but also as a nation that takes joy in Israel's pain and troubles.

In his prophecy, one would have to say that Obadiah's report is one of horror about what he has been shown in his vision. So, Obadiah is being placed in the position of being present as Babylon attacked Israel and he watched Edom help them, and then projects what they are doing into the future when they will do these same dastardly things again. So, the message to Edom is more or less: you shouldn't have done these things, stop doing these things, and don't ever do these things again! But the prophecy informs us that indeed Edom won't stop and they will do them again against Israel in the future.

As a brief editorial: it is important for us to grasp how the Church (in general) looked at this prophecy (and similar ones) and why so much of the Church never took them seriously. Simply it is that Israel ceased to exist as a nation in 70 A.D. and not until the mid-20th century in modern times did it exist again. So, for nearly 2,000 years there was no Israel, no sign it would ever return as a nation, and so no thought about Israel or the prophecies concerning them. None of this was relevant at all to the Church. Once a way of thinking and a number of

foundational doctrines are created about something, they are very hard to re-think or change. So, the Christian community didn't pay a lot of attention to that amazing, impossible moment when Israel was reborn...in a day, as prophesied... as a nation of Jews in 1948. Any of even the remotest thought about Israel had long ago left the Church. Certainly, some newer denominations that sprang up in the 2nd half of the 20th century have noticed Israel's rebirth but the main attraction for them is that this is all about End Times stuff like Armageddon, the Rapture, and the return of Jesus, but with Israel not really playing much of a role other than as caretakers for the Holy Land. For other denominations the reactions are varied. Some deny that Israel's rebirth has any biblical application...that Israel's return is more a clever, self-fulfilling prophecy propagated by a few wealthy Jews and in some ways this rebirth is actually illegitimate. Others see it as an interesting place to visit, but otherwise its existence and purpose doesn't show up on that denomination's radar. Bottom line: it takes interest in the Old Testament to understand the central place God has for Israel in the End Times and beyond. But, if one believes that the Old Testament is antiquated and no longer relevant for Christ followers, then there is no value in studying Obadiah or in taking anything about it seriously. Taking this position is quite problematic because several branches of the Church are finding themselves in a position that they aren't sure whether they want to, or ought to, support the Israelis or the Palestinians in the Gaza war that is going on as I write this piece. Be that as it may, as regards Israel, Obadiah makes it clear what no one is to do towards them.

When verse 12 is brought across from the Hebrew literally, it says something like: But do not gaze upon the day of your brother. The Hebrew Bible is full of expressions and we encounter one of the dozens of them right here. To "gaze" upon someone means to stand back and look with interested pleasure. The strength of the indictment against Edom lies in the word *achi*, which means brother. Edom is literally a brother nation to Israel. Thus, it is abhorrent to a level that is difficult to measure that Jacob's own brother would watch with joy as Jacob was decimated. Since the term "the day" is nearly always associated with wrath and destruction in the Bible, then "the day of your brother" means a time of your brother's ruin.

Edom is told that they should not have openly rejoiced over Israel's destruction. This means the leaders and the people of Edom celebrated Babylon's decimation of Judah. In modern times we find that Jordan (Edom) along with other Arab nations literally held wildly happy street celebrations attended by scores of thousands over the murder, rape, and kidnapping of more than 1200 Israelis by Hamas on Oct. 7, 2023. These people may have gazed with a scornful pleasure upon Israel's troubles, but I guarantee you they also did not escape The Father's gaze that was with anything but pleasure. Whether this was the final End Times occasion that this will happen or there will be another is an open question, but I don't think this was that final occasion just yet.

The 3rd "don't do it" of verse 12 is that Edom ought not to have spoken arrogantly on a day of trouble for Israel. Interestingly, yet another Hebrew expression is used here. Literally this reads "And do not open your mouth wide". This is an idiom that means to throw your head back and howl with laughter. There is an element of scornful mockery involved. We also witnessed this recently with Edom (Jordan) and other Arab nations over the barbarian attack by Hamas upon Israel.

Where we read in the CJB "on a day of trouble" it is certainly correct as a thought translation of the Hebrew, although it is not literal; and I like to look at the literal because it can offer a little more nuanced understanding of what is said. What it says most literally is "on the day of narrow". Here is a brief Hebrew lesson. The Hebrew word is *tsarah*. And while it literally means narrow, in Hebrew idiom form narrow means something that is squeezed down or hard pressed. In the context of a disaster this expands further to mean something like dire straits. So, to say this means "trouble" certainly gets the general idea across but not perfectly. Here's the thing when it comes to translating the Bible: the Old Testament uses barely more than 9000 unique Hebrew vocabulary words. I'm sure that is not the total number of Hebrew words that exist in the Hebrew vocabulary...likely there's not too many more. That might sound like a large number but consider this. When over a 100 years ago the Oxford English Dictionary was first created, there was over 400,000 unique English words in it! So, it's not hard to see that the same Hebrew word necessarily must, in many instances, be used to mean a few very different things. And, there is a wide variety of English words that could be chosen to translate a single Hebrew word, but which is the one that best captures the meaning? The reality is that we simply

do not know the full range of all those possible things those words could have meant 2500 and more years ago, but in recent times we are finally realizing that the Bible is just overflowing with idioms and expressions that makes some of the sort of strange things we read in the Bible suspect as not literal, but it also makes Bible translation even more challenging. Obadiah is especially full of expressions (as well as consisting mostly of poetry), so that is why the book is so technically difficult to decipher.

The next accusation against Edom is that they entered the gate (singular) of God's people in the day of their disaster. That is, whereas we typically have a plural word used for entering Jerusalem (gates), here we do not. While it is conjecture, I think there is validity to the idea that whereas most commentators assume this is talking about the gates into Jerusalem, in reality it is not. The idea behind this verse is buried a little under its words. Probably this is talking about the many small towns and villages scattered throughout Judea, most of which had neither walls nor gates. Rather "gates" simply meant the entry point. The crux of this verse is not that Edom followed the Babylonian soldiers through the city gates of Jerusalem to loot and pillage, but rather they went after the smaller towns that didn't have the same ability to resist them as did Jerusalem; towns that Babylon didn't have much interest in anyway. Typically, only local residents and invited guests entered into a guard-gated city. Why would Babylon and Edom enter in the first place? No doubt to loot just as we are told a few words later. So, again, Israel was in a bad way and a nation that ought to be a brother to them instead conspired with the enemy to do harm to them.

In verse 13 we again hear of Edom gloating over Judah's calamity. In verse 14, it is that Edom should not have stood at the crossroads to cut down the fugitives. The Hebrew is a little hard to decipher and could be speaking about Edom standing at a breach in a city wall or even at the mouth of a narrow pass into the mountains. But, something like "escape route" is the sense of it. So, the idea is that the Edomites (no doubt in a pre-planned maneuver) stationed themselves at the most likely places that the residents of Judah would try to escape from the Babylonian invaders. And, there, Edom would intercept and capture them, possibly to turn them over to Babylon. What a stunning betrayal! It's not just that Edom was a brother nation, it's that the Judahites were God's covenant people and Edom was completely aware of that. There is also another possibility.

It should not go unnoticed that in Amos chapter 1, Edom is spoken of as being involved in the human trafficking trade. It is said that Philistia and Tyre would hand over entire populations of people to Edom (who likely paid for them at wholesale prices). According to 2 Chronicles 28, Edom actually raided Judah and captured people... but for what purposes? To increase their own population? Not likely. So, what I am saying is that rather than Edom working in concert with Babylon to capture fleeing Judahites and giving them to Babylon, they used this opportune situation to capture these fleeing Judahites to keep for themselves and use them in the slave trade. Essentially this is kidnapping that uses those taken to exchange for money. The effect is the same compared to Hamas kidnapping close to 300 Israelis, and holding them as bargaining chips. No matter how far astray Israel and many Israelis have gone, they are still God's people and for Hamas or anyone to do such a thing to them is to play with divine fire. To support Hamas's actions makes those leaders and their nations, and those faith groups, equally culpable.

Moving on to verse 15, the matter of what Edom did to Israel is explained in terms of what is going to happen to them in return. Everything that Edom did, will now happen to them. It is better to rearrange verse 15 so that the order that is no doubt intended is more clear. Whereas it says:

CJB Obadiah 1:15 *For the Day of ADONAI is near for all nations; as you did, it will be done to you; your dealings will come back on your own head.*

It is more clear this way:

Just as you have done, it will be done to you; your deeds will return upon your own head. For the day of Yehoveh is near against all the nations.

So, the idea is that Edom will suffer its consequences for dealing with God's covenant people, and it will happen in connection with the event of the Day of the Lord against all the nations of the world. And, several prophets make it clear that God's wrath against the nations is an End Times event. Therefore, I'd like you to please hear this; you and your family's well-being might depend on it. You and I live in those nations that are prophesied for destruction. That Believers live in

these nations...even Believers that support Israel and stand against their enemies... doesn't change things. This is the nature of national and communal judgments.

Our status as Believers has to do with our individual salvation and relationship with God, which is a different issue than what happens to the nation or group we are part of. The thing is this: the ancient prophecies don't nuance the destruction and evil that will happen to the nations of the world the way the New Testament does. The New Testament divides the mayhem and catastrophes into two categories: tribulation and wrath. Tribulation is the result of man's evil against other men. For example, what Hitler did was man's evil against other men... it was not God's wrath. On the other hand, what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah was not man's evil against other men but rather the destruction was due to God's wrath.

Believers, we will definitely be around in the End Times to suffer from tribulation no matter what nation we are part of and no matter how devout of Believers we are in Yeshua. However... the purpose of the Rapture is so that the same devout Believers will not suffer God's wrath. Thus, as we follow the 21 judgments of Revelation, what we notice is that the first several judgments are the result of tribulation. Starting with the 6th seal judgment, however, it is God's wrath that begins to be poured out so whatever exactly the Rapture is, it seems that it happens before then. What is interesting is that while the nations will suffer God's wrath, Israel won't. In fact, His wrath is largely about taking divine vengeance against the nations of the world for doing things against Israel that they should not have done. All of this is why I'm so adamant about the importance of preparation. Preparation is not about avoiding calamities or even tribulation; it is about surviving them. But, by definition, all preparation can only be beforehand. Once a calamity strikes, it is too late.

One of the interesting features of verse 15 is the statement that the Day of Yehoveh is "near". The Hebrew word is **qarob** and it means near in respect to time or sometimes in distance (that is, as opposed to far away in time or distance). Here's the thing: very likely even though that is the proper and technical definition of the word **qarob**, it is actually used as a kind of Hebrew stereotypical expression to get across the idea of urgency. That is, it is a manner

of speaking that says that change or at least our focused attention is needed right away as opposed to God trying to give us a timetable or a location for when or where an event will happen. We use typical expressions like this in English. When we say "give me a minute", we're not speaking about a duration of time, or exactly 60 seconds for use in a timetable, we're saying that we have to do something before we leave or some such thing, and it won't take very long. My mother used to say to me: Your room is a disaster. You've got 30 seconds to get that cleaned up! She didn't mean that ½ half of a minute is all the time I had to begin and finish cleaning up my room. She meant I was to stop what I was doing right now and go clean my room.

Another point I'd like to make: when God says "as you did it will be done to you" in many ways sounds like the opposite of what we've been taught from the pulpit about human relationships. That is, we are instructed NOT to repay evil done to us with evil, but rather with kindness. We are not to retaliate when someone offends us... and so on. However, what this issue of like for like is envisioning here in Obadiah is the long-standing principle of justice that God has ordained, which scholars call Lex Talionis. Or, proportional justice. That is, we are not to execute a person for stealing property. And if a person steals a goat, they are not required to replace it with a bull. But it has another side to it. If someone murders another, they must give up their own life. So, God's justice for Edom and for the nations is that the manners in which they harmed and oppressed Israel will be visited back upon them as the same measure of the punishment they deserve. Historically speaking, Israel has been destroyed a few times by gentile nations. Each time, they have eventually come back as a nation. So, now God will destroy the nations who participated in destroying them. And while this cycle may repeat, in the End Times it will be the end of these cycles and these nations will never arise again... or at least in any recognizable form.

There is also another aspect of how Edom treated Israel coming back on their own head that is something valuable that I learned the hard way as a younger man. It is that typically a natural consequence of attempting revenge or retribution for an offense against you will backfire in the longer run. And, just as typically, doing something intentionally harmful against someone will nearly always result in a negative consequence to the perpetrator. It may not be immediate, but it is close to inevitable. In other words, while in the case of Edom

God's wrath certainly is the catalyst, it doesn't always have to be. Our own unwise and unkind actions can turn around and eventually bite us in ways we never could have imagined, even though we might get immediate benefit or satisfaction. It seems as though this is just the way the universe operates and why wouldn't it? Yehoveh, God the Creator, designed it all and spoke it into existence and so naturally every process operates in ways that reflect His plan and order. It is inescapable... although from Adam and Eve forward, humanity has believed God's plan and order can be defeated...even heavenly creatures have tried and failed.

So, from verse 15 of Obadiah forward we find a concept presented that is equal in its universal effect to that which I just mentioned about how the Cosmos and all life... spiritual and biological... was planned and ordered. It is that the Day of Yehoveh *is* coming! Nothing can delay it, and nothing can defeat it. This intervention into the affairs of humans will affect every level of society, beginning with the military and the political, but also quickly engulfing the leaders of all the world's religions. Amos, Zephaniah, Jeremiah, and Isaiah all speak about this day. So, what we have to grasp is that Edom's fate is not unique or isolated; rather our entire planet will be affected because our entire planet...every nation... has become like Edom in God's eyes. Listen to one of the most exciting and terrifying passages in all of the Prophets.

CJB Zechariah 14:1-3 *Look, a day is coming for ADONAI when your plunder, [Yerushalayim], will be divided right there within you. ² "For I will gather all the nations against Yerushalayim for war. The city will be taken, the houses will be rifled, the women will be raped, and half the city will go into exile; but the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city." ³ Then ADONAI will go out and fight against those nations, fighting as on a day of battle.*

This passage perfectly mirrors what we have been studying in Obadiah.

It is the way of humans...that's all of us... to think in relative terms. I've heard (and I suppose admittedly used to think) that in the End Times when this Day of the Lord arrives and all the nations are ravaged, the USA will be the lone exception. Why? We may not be perfect, but we must be a better and more good-minded nation than all the others, so God will spare us. I have realized that

this is a false conception. Some of this false conception was because until perhaps 20 years ago, we thought of ourselves as a fundamentally, and majority, Christian nation devoted to God. The truth is that even though our founding fathers believed strongly in God, the Bible, and the 10 commandments, many were deists and little more. Still, we think, that's better than nothing or believing in a false god. Then we think that institutional Christianity is the faith that Yeshua taught, and so if we adhere to that we are relatively better than those who don't. But when we open up recorded Church history, we find that the Church as we know it actually began in the 4th century at the urging of Constantine, and in Rome... not in the Holy Land... and it disavowed the Jewish people, Israel, and the very Bible that Yeshua and all the Apostles used and taught from. But, we think, even if that's true, it's better than following Islam, or Hinduism, or any other religion, because at least there is a nugget of truth at its core (that Jesus is Savior).

If I take \$5 from my mom's purse, but you steal an iPhone, I'm still a better person than you because even though both things are stealing, stealing an iPhone is worse. And if much of the world supports Hamas and the Palestinians against Israel, but I support the Palestinians AND Israel, I'm a much better person and God will accept it more because although I'm not supposed to support Israel's enemies at least I also support Israel. Relative. But, the Bible couldn't be more clear that this is simply not how God sees things nor is it taught that way in the Holy Scriptures. And this is why a lot of nations, politicians, religious leaders, laymen and just regular secular folks are going to be shocked and surprised when the Day of Yehoveh arrives. Let's remove any such naïve notions from our minds. All nations are going to suffer God's wrath, and therefore every nation's citizens will as well, and it won't be on a humanly calculated relative basis. It is written, and so it will be, whether we think it fair and just or not.

Might you be thinking that what I'm saying is a bit overboard? Let's read Obadiah verse 16.

CJB Obadiah 1:16 *For just as you have drunk on my holy mountain, so will all the nations drink in turn; yes, they will drink and gulp it down and be as if they had never existed.*

If that isn't a wake-up call, I don't know what is.

The first word of this verse shouldn't be overlooked. In Hebrew the word is *ki*. It is a word that could be called a connecting-word. In this case it connects verse 16 to verse 15. That is, because of verse 15, then verse 16 is going to happen. However, that leaves a fundamental question for this verse: who is the "you" that have drunk of God's holy mountain? Is it Edom? Is it the nations? Or is it the Israelites? This has been a subject of debate for a very long time, but that debate is more centered on Christian fundamentalism than on real Bible exegesis. That is, more on traditional Church doctrine than on what the Bible says. What the Bible says takes some previous understanding about what God is doing and why, and so it explains His speech. Basically, it is this: some of the previous Days of the Lord were God's wrath upon His own people Israel for their unfaithfulness and rebellion. But, in the end, God's wrath will be upon all the nations in order to preserve and protect Israel.

Thus, the "you" in the opening phrase is Israel. And, what Israel has drunk is God's furious wrath. Now, so will the nations.

We'll continue in Obadiah next week.