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What's the Point....of Obadiah?

Mark Garner

The short prophetic book of Obadiah contains some sobering teachings, yet it also helps us understand God's nature, as well as giving us guidance in our walk of faith. In Obadiah, the long-standing rivalry between Jacob and Esau is used as a metaphor in our relationship with God. The book also shows us our Heavenly Father's promises to faithful believers.

Mount Zion & Mount Edom (Overview Of Obadiah)

Obadiah's prophecies are addressed to the nation of Edom, Esau's descendants who lived in the mountains south of the Dead Sea. The prophet uses the ancient conflict between Israel and Edom as a metaphor for the choices we make as we seek and understand God. Like Amos, the book is full of stern images, yet it also reminds us of the promise that the Lord will bring deliverance near for those who seek him.

Obadiah opens with a vivid image of Edom's prideful hearts (Obadiah 1:1-4). They are so certain of their strongholds and their cleverness, that they openly ask whether anyone can bring them down to the ground. This is a memorable example of human pride, an attitude that impresses worldly minds, yet an attitude that hardens human hearts and causes significant spiritual harm. Hardened hearts can also begin a vicious cycle, as Obadiah will explain.

Edom's pride had also led them to trust in false friends, and in addition it caused them to indulge their disdain for the Israelites (Obadiah 1:5-14). Several times in history, the Edomites had turned on the Israelites when they were already in trouble, most notably in 586 BC when Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians. We see human nature at its worst in Obadiah's description; their envy turned to violence, their desire for rivalry turned to treachery, their competitiveness became looting and gloating. This again parallels some of the many possible consequences of human pride.

Yet in God's desire for us to seek him, he promises that there will be deliverance for those who turn to him (Obadiah 1:15-21). The day of the Lord is near, when everyone from any nation may seek him, so he may refine us and may give us the inheritance of being with God. Not only will the deliverer come to Mount Zion, Jesus also gives those in Edom's mountains the chance to be part of his spiritual kingdom too.

Through Jesus, all of us can come to Mount Zion; God calls all of us to draw near and receive the grace we need, so he may give our souls new life. He cautions us about Edom's faithlessness, pride, self-centeredness, and what they lead to; and he reminds us instead to walk humbly and reverently, and to walk by faith rather than by outward appearances.

Obadiah helps us see a number of aspects of God's nature; it shows us that he is holy, righteous, merciful, and gracious, as well as several other characteristics. The book also shows us our Heavenly Father's desire for each of us to turn to him and to put our faith in him, instead of trusting in this world's empty teachings and its futile ways. God's teachings are timeless, and they tell us of his unchanging desire to give mercy, compassion, and other spiritual blessings to those who humbly open their hearts to him.

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What's the Point....of Obadiah? Caleb Dillinger

Obadiah is one of the shorter books of the Bible - just 1 chapter! Yet, it's far more complex than some of the longer prophets. Likely, this is not a book of the Bible you tend to read before bed for peace, or read to children to teach them about God. This is a message with two primary purposes: rebuke sin, and proclaim the Lord's power.

Edom, or Esau's descendants, has been swayed by their own pride to think highly of themselves, and heap violence and abuse on Israel. This message comes after Israel's fall into captivity, and one of the charges Obadiah makes against Edom is that they not only did not come to Israel's defense, but they celebrated and gloated over Israel's failure. Pride in self, and joy over the pain and fall of others earned Edom the wrath of God, which Obadiah makes clear. Because of their sin, they will be brought down (vs 4), and be like stubble against a fire (vs 18). The first message is clear: stand against God and his people, and you will fall. No matter how great you (or your country) think you are, you're nothing compared to the power of God. Which is the second major point Obadiah makes.

In the second verse, the Lord claims He will bring Edom down from the pride with which they had built up. Even in verse 18, as he talks about Israel getting to be the fire against Edom's stubble, it's done through the speaking of the Lord, by his command. But most clear of all is the final verse (21): the kingdom shall be the LORD's. It does not matter what army is there, the Lord is greater. It does not matter how long it takes, the Lord outlasts. The Lord is filled with power and will use it to bring justice. That's what the Day of the Lord is essentially described as: a day of justice. Verse 15 says " As you have done, it shall be done to you; your deeds shall return on your own head." The Lord's power works justice to the evil.

So why read this little book today in 21st century America? For one, it humbles any concept of "let's be great" or "we are the best". Compared to God, no one is great, not even his people! God alone is great in righteousness and power. We ought to always keep a humble mind when talking of greatness and thinking of our pride. Second, it reminds us that when others gloat over us, or insult us, or refuse to help us, we can count on the Lord to come to our rescue. It may not be when we like or exactly how we want, but the Lord brings salvation through his power. On that, we can trust. Reading Obadiah reinforces that message.