



Obadiah

Introduction

Obadiah primarily addresses the people of Edom and warns of divine judgment. The Edomites descended from Esau. Esau was older brother to Jacob, father of the Israelites. This familial history is part of the reason for judgment. At some point in their mutual history, Judah (in southern Israel) was invaded.¹ Edom did nothing to help its sibling-nation. As the invaders punished Judah, the Edomites mocked. And when Judah was too broken to defend himself, Edom looted his disgraced brother.

Most of the prophets predicted judgment of some kind on those nations to which they were sent. Obadiah is intriguing because of the mode of judgment. Instead of wrath coming in the form of hail storms, plagues, or blighted crops, wrath comes through the house of Judah, through the people of God. This is by no means the only instance of this in the Bible. But it is unique for a book to focus on judgment coming through the people of God.

Obadiah's focus foreshadows an important but unappreciated teaching in the New Testament: God's judgment is administered through Christ *and His body*. The idea that Christ is the instrument of God's wrath is not uncommon. But as the instrument of judgment Christ is usually seen as separate from the church. After the resurrection, there is no such Christ, and there is no such church. The New Testament envisions one New Man, Head and body (Eph. 2:15). What that Man does, He does as one.

¹ Possibly during the reign of King Jehoram of Judah. See 2 Chronicles 21:8-10, 16-17.

God Complex

In Obadiah's first nine verses, God confronts Edom with His displeasure and pledges their destruction. Edom is completely self-confident, thinking itself a great nation (Ob. 2-3). Edom is sure of its position, of the niche it has carved out for itself in the world. The Edomites have achieved such status they consider themselves untouchable (Ob. 3).

As Obadiah describes it, Edom has a god-complex. Repulsive as that might be, it is not unique to the people of Edom; it is universal to humankind. When the prophecy climaxes in verse 15, it says, "For the Day of the LORD is near, against all the nations." The Edomites are representative of people everywhere, in every nation. The writer of Hebrews also warns us to "make sure that there isn't any immoral or irreverent person like Esau, who sold his birthright in exchange for one meal" (Heb. 12:16). Like Esau, fallen humanity cares little for the things of God or spiritual inheritance. We would trade eternity for a full belly.

Deliverance in Zion

Verses 17 and 18 provide the contrast to Esau and fallen humanity. The Lord promises deliverance on Mount Zion. Zion was also known as the City of David (Jerusalem) and was the place where the Lord's temple was located. As the temple site, Zion was the place where the Lord dwelled in the earth; here, sacrifice was made. Under the old covenant, spiritual deliverance—from the fallen state—was found in Zion. This deliverance was not just for Israel but for all people. At the temple's dedication, Solomon prayed, "Even for the foreigner who is not of Your people Israel but has come from a distant land because of Your name...may You hear in heaven, Your dwelling place, and do according to all the foreigner asks You for. Then all the people on earth will know Your name...." (1 Kings 8:41-43).

Speaking to the Pharisees about Himself, Jesus said, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it up again in three days" (John 2:19). The old covenant temple pictured Jesus, where all of God's fullness dwells bodily (Col. 2:9). God's true temple was destroyed at the cross, when Jesus died for the sins of the world. Deliverance from the fallen state was provided in the temple of Jesus through His sacrifice. The temple at Zion looked ahead to this final deliverance in Christ.

Paul tells us that Christ—and all in Him—resurrected as a temple in which God dwells by His Spirit (Eph. 2:21-22). Here is a further aspect of deliverance: a people no longer dead in sin but raised from the dead and alive to God. Just as Esau represented all fallen humanity, Israel pictured all those delivered through Zion—the death and resurrection of Christ, God's temple.

No Survivor

Following the promise of deliverance on Mount Zion, Obadiah says, "Then the house of Jacob will be a blazing fire, and the house of Joseph, a burning flame, but the house of Esau will be stubble; Jacob will set them on fire and consume Edom. Therefore no survivor will remain of the house of Esau, for the Lord has spoken" (Ob. 18).

Here, God's people are referred to as a house named for their head, Jacob. God promises His fire will flow through His people, Jacob's house, and consume Esau.

Hebrews 3 tells us we are God's house, and that God's house is named for its head, Christ. Calling Christ and His body God's house is another way of talking about the resurrected temple we are with Jesus. The prophecy in Obadiah shows that judgment will come through us—the temple and house of God. But how can this be? How can any of us be fit to judge? Surely such a burden belongs to Christ alone. Surely He is the only one righteous enough to judge others.

The Man Appointed

Acts 17:31 tells us God “has set a day when He is going to judge the world in righteousness by the Man He has appointed.” Jesus is the man appointed. But as we have just seen, Jesus is a temple together with us. He is head of God's house, which we are. Ephesians 2 tells us Jesus and those who believe are one New Man (Eph. 2:15). It is this Man—not an individual but a many-membered Man—by which God will judge the world.

In 1 Corinthians 6, Paul scolded the Christians in Corinth for taking each other to court. He grieved because the Corinthians were not reflecting Christ. When treated unjustly, Jesus bore it patiently. Instead of walking as Jesus did, the Corinthians were fighting for their due and mistreating each other in worldly courts (1 Cor. 6:7-8). Paul considered this a moral failure, a betrayal of the divine nature that should have governed them.

The Corinthians lacked a true vision of who they were by union with Jesus. To inform their vision further, Paul asked, “Or don't you know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest cases? Don't you know that we will judge angels—not to mention ordinary matters?” (1 Cor. 6:2-3). These are stunning statements. We are one with Jesus—in death, in resurrection, in Spirit-empowered ministry, in judging the world. This is to say nothing about judging spiritual beings—heavenly traitors to the true God.

How can we even take such realities to heart or make them relevant in day-to-day life? It doesn't seem possible. Yet the Lord would not disclose these things if there were no point in us knowing them.

Judged Within

Revelation 5:9 says of Jesus, “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slaughtered....” Every time a seal is broken on the scroll, judgment is released. Jesus, the Lamb, is worthy to release judgment because He was slaughtered. Because He suffered judgment on the cross, only He is worthy to dispense judgment. He is not doling out anything He has not already endured Himself.

First Corinthians 6:2 more literally reads, “Or are you not all knowing that the saints will be judging the world? And if in you the world is being judged, are you unworthy of the smallest

cases?” Most often, the entire verse is translated in the future tense. But there are two tenses: the saints will judge the world, and the world is presently being judged **in** the saints.

Jesus is worthy to unleash judgment on the world because He suffered judgment on the cross. It must be the same for us: We can only judge the world with Christ if the world is being judged within us now, by the cross.

We were crucified with Christ (Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:19-20). Our fleshly, worldly selves were put to death in Jesus. It is not enough for His death to be a fact “out there” somewhere. We must experience the death of Christ within, by the Spirit. As the psalmist observed, “Surely you desire truth in the inmost being” (Psalm 51:6).

Paul comes from this vantage point when he chides the Corinthians for taking each other to court. There was no evidence that Christ’s death was operational in them; they were suing each other instead of suffering wrong with their Master. The world wasn’t being judged in them; they were using legal force to get all they could out of it.

Paul’s next words must’ve been a shock. He reminds the Corinthians that the unrighteous won’t inherit the kingdom of God, and gives examples: adulterers, homosexuals, drunkards, swindlers, etc. The inference is that the Corinthians are behaving like those who will be judged with the world, not like those who will judge the world with Christ.

Each of us has a choice: judge the world with Christ, or be judged with the world by Christ. Paul ends his exhortation by appealing to the Corinthians’ new identity in Jesus: “And some of you used to be like this. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor. 6:11).

The Lord appeals to us in the same way. The cross happened. We have been set apart and justified by the death and resurrection of Christ. It is possible to live in that reality and to let it live in us. In fact, it is more than possible. It is Christianity. It is what we believe.

Life or Death

Jesus said, “The Father, in fact, judges no one but has given all judgment to the Son” (John 5:22). A couple verses later, He describes how He judges: “I assure you: Anyone who hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life and will not come under judgment but has passed from death to life” (John 5:24). Whatever final judgment comes in the future is being decided now. How we respond to Jesus and His message **today** determines whether we pass from death to life.

As noted previously, there is no such thing as Jesus existing separately from His body, the church. There is one New Man, Head and body. When Jesus says the Father has given all judgment to the Son, we must understand that we share in the task of judging. Just as Jesus said, that judgment has already begun through the gospel.

When we present the gospel, we are offering our hearers a choice: pass from death to life or remain in death. Just as the Father sent Jesus, so Jesus sends us (Matt. 28:19). We are not presenting our own teachings. There is no such thing as “speaking my truth” in Christianity. If anyone rejects our message, they are not rejecting us; they are rejecting the one who sent us—Jesus. In this, they judge themselves.

God is merciful and appeals to us many times throughout our lives. At final judgment, those consigned to the second death (as Revelation terms it) will have chosen death many times over throughout their lives (Rev. 20:14-15). With Jesus, the church holds the sword of the Spirit, the word of God, out into the flow of history, dividing it. The edge of that blade sends each of us into life or death.

Judging as We Hear

Jesus ends His discussion about judgment in John five by saying, “I can do nothing out from myself; as I hear, I judge. And my judgment is right because I don’t seek my own will but the will of the one who sent me” (John 5:30).

Adam and Eve fell when they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Satan said this knowledge would make them like God. This heritage means each of us wields the knowledge of good and evil for ourselves, judging everything as if we are little gods. Though He actually is God, Jesus doesn’t judge out from Himself or by His own will. His Father is His source. We judge out from ourselves, by our own will, all the time. Good and evil are gauged by our own perspective, biased toward ourselves.

Once again, the answer to our situation is the cross. Paul said, “If One died for all, then all died. And He died for all so that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for the One who died for them and was raised (2 Cor. 5:14-15).

The cross makes it possible for us to say (with Jesus), “I can do nothing out from myself; as I hear, I judge.” If we died when Jesus died, we no longer need to do or judge out from self. We can judge as we hear, and judge rightly since we aren’t seeking our own will.

A Kingdom of Yahweh

Obadiah’s prophecy ends with a vision of God’s people occupying land that once belonged to Edom (Ob. 19-20). The last verse says, “Saviors will come to Mount Zion to judge the mountains of Esau, and the kingdom will be of Yahweh” (Ob. 21).

There are a few things to note about this verse: 1) As we’ve seen, Mount Zion was the location of God’s temple. Within the temple, sacrifices were offered to God; 2) Mountains represented seats of authority, power, and government in old testament times; 3) In Hebrew verbiage, to judge or be a judge encompassed more than giving legal decisions and sentencing; it included ruling or governing. In the days before Israel had kings, scripture says God raised up judges to lead His people (Judges 2:16).

When Obadiah says saviors will judge the mountains of Esau from Mount Zion, he envisions God's people ruling Esau from the location of God's temple. Since God will rule His people, and they will rule Esau, "the kingdom will be of Yahweh." The final picture is of Yahweh judging and governing all through His saviors.

Yahweh Saves

The word "saviors" and the name Jesus are forms of the same Hebrew word. Jesus means, "Yahweh saves." Matthew's gospel tells us Jesus was given this name "because He will save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21).

When Obadiah says "Saviors will come to Mount Zion to judge," he again foreshadows the church's participation in judging. Saying "saviors" does not mean each of us is a little Jesus judging on our own. As we've seen, individuals judging independently characterizes the fallen state. Instead, "saviors" emphasizes the fact that the one New Man has many members. As Paul says, "Now there are many parts, yet one body" (1 Cor. 12:20). This one New Man and His many members judge as one.

Obadiah's picture of saviors gathering to Mount Zion evokes the reality of Christ and the church forming a temple where God dwells by His Spirit (Eph. 2). The temple of Christ and His body has a sacrifice within, just as the old covenant temple did: Christ crucified. On the cross, Jesus gave up His life to God for our sake. Peter says Jesus is the Living Stone; we gather to Him as living stones to form a spiritual house where we offer spiritual sacrifices through Jesus (1 Peter 2:4-5).

It is through the spiritual house of Christ and the church that God rules and judges. The new altar, the cross, shows the mindset of God's kingdom. After talking about how worldly rulers govern by dominating their subjects, Jesus tells His disciples, "whoever wants to be first among you must be a slave to all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life — a ransom for many" (Mark 10:44-45). It is by this ethos that Christ and His body rule and judge.

A kingdom governed and judged by self-giving is truly a kingdom of Yahweh. Since God is love, any kingdom sourcing from Him must function based on the love and mercy of the cross (1 John 4:16). God's desire now, and into eternity, is to spread the love and mercy of His kingdom through His people. Paul touches on this when he says he was given grace to proclaim the riches of Christ "so God's multi-faceted wisdom may now be made known through the church" (Eph. 3:8-10).

If we, the church, are to make God's wisdom known, we must know it in ourselves first. We must receive love and mercy if we are to rule by it. We must experience the judgment of the cross if we are to judge.