

*Sermon on Obadiah prepared by Jonathan Shradar*

*YouVersion events; if you are able, stand for the reading of the word.*

**God is on the throne and cares for his own.**

**Obadiah 1–4** “The vision of Obadiah. Thus says the Lord GOD concerning Edom: We have heard a report from the LORD, and a messenger has been sent among the nations: “Rise up! Let us rise against her for battle!” [2] Behold, I will make you small among the nations; you shall be utterly despised. [3] The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rock, in your lofty dwelling, who say in your heart, “Who will bring me down to the ground?” [4] Though you soar aloft like the eagle, though your nest is set among the stars, from there I will bring you down, declares the LORD.” (ESV)

As we arrive on the last day of January I think it is finally safe to talk about New Year’s resolutions and what we hope to gain from them and why we give them up so often.

I think it is right to survey life and evaluate where you can spend more energy to get healthy, to build relationships, to step up your game at work or school, and to grow in your love for the word of God. Whatever it may be, these good things are worth pursuing. The challenge is sticking with it.

Psychologically, where there is reward experienced after a behavior, the behavior has a greater chance of becoming habit. When it comes to resolutions however we are so trained by our lifestyles to expect quick fixes that the far-off reward doesn’t hold our attention. We want the diet, exercise, and homework shortcuts! But when they let us down, we give up.

It’s not 100% your fault! We are conditioned for it. Our food is fast. Answers to tough questions can be found if we just ask Alexa. We can communicate in less than an instant and read any book or watch any show ever created in seconds.

Even so, life while a mist on the cosmic scale of things, is the accumulation of long-lived moments. Years of study that pays off. As fine wine improves with age, we too can become more refined, complex, and enjoyable given enough time.

Healthy marriages build upon the years. Expertise comes through the combination of years of practice.

Where we might wish for a shortcut, the best of life is experienced in the longcut.

And I think Obadiah helps us see a little bit of this, especially when it comes to walking a road that is bumpy and steep. When things don't go according to plan.

### **God is on the throne and cares for his own.**

Obadiah is the shortest book in the OT. And it is delivered not to Israel or Judah as the first three Minor Prophets were, but to Edom, the ancient "brother" of Israel who has rejected God.

We know nothing about the prophet. While his name is common in Scripture, he is not among the dozen Obadiah's mentioned.

We think this message was delivered after the Babylonian exile had taken place. So at the moment Judah has been displaced and lives among their oppressors. They have tasted the fruit of their disobedience, but Obadiah stands as a word to Israel's enemy and it provides a ray of hope to comfort and strengthen God's people.

We have it in Scripture for that very reason. It bears similarity to Revelation. Written to a burdened people, the marginalized in exile, the hurting meant to draw them to worship and trust the Lord's providential plan. An anchor of hope for those suffering on the longcut. Edom no longer exists. After 70 AD it was wiped off the map never to return - so keeping this prophecy to Edom is for God's people.

Maybe it can be a help to us, wherever we are on the journey.

Here is what Obadiah says of God.

### **God is on the throne.**

Where do you find yourself? Waiting? Wondering? Hopeful? Hurting? This word is for you.

The Creator of the cosmos is not absent or disinterested and his plan continues to unfold for his glory and our good, even when it doesn't seem like it.

This truth is under the rubble of the spiritual conflict and tension between Edom and Israel. And to rightly understand the deep conflict we have to go back to Esau and Jacob.

**Genesis 25:21–23** “And Isaac prayed to the LORD for his wife, because she was barren. And the LORD granted his prayer, and Rebekah his wife conceived. [22] The children struggled together within her, and she said, “If it is thus, why is this happening to me?” So she went to inquire of the LORD. [23] And the LORD said to her, “Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the older shall serve the younger.” (ESV)

You might know the story well. Esau, the brute, hairy and aggressive, and Jacob, the soft, momma's boy. While Esau is the older of the two he will recklessly give up his birthright for a bowl of stew. And two nations divide from that moment.

We often think of Esau as a bumbling character that is too shortsighted for his own good. But the author of Hebrews calls him godless, unholy. Because of that, there is conflict and tension that remains even when the nations are in the land, warring against each other, taking sides with invaders.

But the tension goes furth back, to the description of other offspring. **Genesis 3:15** “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” (ESV)

The curse experienced as spiritual conflict from that moment onward. Cain and Abel, Esau and Jacob, nations, enemies. The seed of the serpent, still to this day making trouble with the children of God.

What can feel like ebbs and flows of human history and the existence of spiritual conflict, of things going differently than we thought they should, it all plays into the providence of God. And we can trust that he is in control.

Because he won't let rejection and aggression go unconfrosted.

Here he makes clear to Edom that their pride is their ruin. “The pride of your heart has deceived you... even as you look out from your secure cliffs and tribe of wise men.

**Obadiah 10** “Because of the violence done to your brother Jacob, shame shall cover you, and you shall be cut off forever.” (ESV)

Edom gloated over Judah’s trouble and it has not gone unnoticed. For all of their security, their sense of superiority, they will be snuffed out.

None can stand against Yahweh. **Obadiah 15** “For the day of the LORD is near upon all the nations. As you have done, it shall be done to you; your deeds shall return on your own head.” (ESV)

We feel like we know this, God opposes the proud, every nation, all people will stand before his judgment.

But imagine hearing this of those that mocked you as you were carted off into exile. That God will bring divine retribution on the enemy of his people. Judah is experiencing the fruits of their own disobedience yet despite Israel’s sin, God will judge those who afflict his people and he will restore his people who will be an everlasting blessing to the whole world.

"These are great promises of comfort to Judah, but don't forget that when they were spoken Judah was in exile in Babylon. The house of Jacob was desolate - no king, no priests, no temple, no land! From their vantage point, it sure did not look like the kingdom would be the Lord's. In fact, it looked more like Esau had finally triumphed over Jacob." Selvaggio

But God has another word. His mercy is ultimately restraining and conquering the enemies of the people he loves.

Made his people, now we can trust in his rule and reign as we face enemies, our own sin, and the troubles that so often trip us up.

Obadiah is speaking to Edom but loud enough that Judah can hear. God’s got you, your enemies are toast. Stand fast. Hold on. Trust him.

And he is speaking loud enough for us to hear the same truth. We look not to the hills for help, but the One who created the hills, and all things, who is working his plan from the throne of the universe. And we can live for the long haul knowing he is in control.

“The only serious mistake we can make when illness comes, when anxiety threatens, when conflict disturbs our relationships with others is to conclude that God has gotten bored looking after us and has shifted his attention to a more exciting Christian, or that God has become disgusted with our meandering obedience and decided to let us fend for ourselves for a while, or that God has gotten too busy fulfilling prophecy in the Middle East to take time now to sort out the complicated mess we have gotten ourselves into. That is the only serious mistake we can make...” Eugene Peterson

He is on the throne, in control, and for you.

### **God cares for his own.**

For those in exile, in the thick of trouble without a horizon in sight... God promises deliverance.

**Obadiah 17–18** “But in Mount Zion there shall be those who escape, and it shall be holy, and the house of Jacob shall possess their own possessions. [18] The house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau stubble; they shall burn them and consume them, and there shall be no survivor for the house of Esau, for the LORD has spoken.” (ESV)

Deliverance that is restoration. Rooted in his past care Judah can hope in the future. Because God has brought them out of slavery before, his promise to do it again can be trusted. Clinged to, hoped for and cherished as what they need to get through.

Leads to the light that is his coming kingdom.

**Obadiah 19–21** “Those of the Negeb shall possess Mount Esau, and those of the Shephelah shall possess the land of the Philistines; they shall possess the land of Ephraim and the land of Samaria, and Benjamin shall possess Gilead. [20] The exiles of this host of the people of Israel shall possess the land of the Canaanites

as far as Zarephath, and the exiles of Jerusalem who are in Sepharad shall possess the cities of the Negeb. [21] Saviors shall go up to Mount Zion to rule Mount Esau, and the kingdom shall be the LORD's." (ESV)

His people will come home to reign with him. They will become an everlasting blessing to the world, a beacon of hope for all to see.

Here's the thing, we find ourselves as exiles. Unsettled by the world bearing down. And this is where we launch into life from.

"People submerged in a culture swarming with lies and malice feel as if they are drowning in it: they can trust nothing they hear, depend on no one they meet. Such dissatisfaction with the world as it is, is preparation for traveling in the way of Christian discipleship. The dissatisfaction, coupled with a longing for peace and truth, can set us on a pilgrim path of wholeness in God." Eugene Peterson, Long Obedience

Like Judah learning to trust the One on the throne, we live rooted in the inauguration of the Kingdom promised in Obadiah. We know this kingdom finds its fulfillment in Christ.

**Mark 1:14–15** "Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, [15] and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." (ESV)

In Jesus, the long-anticipated new creation of God is inaugurated. We today live in the light of the dawning of God's eternal kingdom.

Jesus restores Israel and saves a remnant even of Edom. He lives a life of obedience for all those that will believe in him and dies to earn for us citizenship in his kingdom. All of our sin, that which sent us into exile, forgiven. All of our enemies, even those that stir up trouble today, under his foot.

The crucified Savior confounding the wise of Edom and the world, by sacrificing himself for his own, pouring out grace like he pours out his blood for us.

This is what brightens us - what sheds light on the darkness - what sustains us as we follow him in all of life. His kingdom is headed to consummation.

**Revelation 11:15** “Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.” (ESV)

**Revelation 12:10** “And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.” (ESV)

"The triumphant and hopeful ending of Obadiah's prophecy highlights the great theme of reversal that runs through the whole Bible. God's humbled people will reign with him in the consummation of his kingdom in Christ..." GTB

It's the hope we need. Like a kite string held by strong hands, though the wind blows and the kite winds and swirls, the sting holds.

"Only the first rays of the light of justice appear in Obadiah. But these rays will eventually add up to a kingdom of light, in which all nations will be judged justly from the eternal throne in heaven." EP

And in Christ, we are the exiles made residents. Children given an inheritance.

God cares for his own. His kingdom plays the long game. Hold on. Jesus is holding you.

**Philippians 1:6** “And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” (ESV)

He is not done with you yet -- he will vindicate his people.

His kingdom is at hand, so we repent and believe.

"Repentance, the first word in Christian immigration, sets us on the way to traveling in the light. It is a rejection that is also an acceptance, a leaving that develops into an arriving, a no to the world that is a yes to God." Long Obedience

We live under his claim and call for us, to welcome those that were once enemies into this kingdom, to extend grace and light where darkness once reigned.

The light of Obadiah 21, the hope of the kingdom, is on time for all time. We can hold it before us as we take the long way, one step at a time, shoulder to shoulder with other saints, empowered by the Spirit.

**Colossians 1:26–29** Entrusted with... “the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. [27] To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. [28] Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. [29] For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.” (ESV)

### **God is on the throne and cares for his own.**

A one-year-old boy shattered his back falling down a flight of stairs. He spent his childhood and youth in and out of hospital. Gavin Read, the former Bishop of Maidstone, interviewed him in church. The boy remarked, ‘God is fair.’ Gavin asked, ‘How old are you?’ ‘Seventeen,’ the boy replied. ‘How many years have you spent in hospital?’ The boy answered, ‘Thirteen years.’ Gavin asked, ‘Do you think that is fair?’ He replied, ‘God has got all of eternity to make it up to me.’

Whatever comes our way, on this long journey home, we belong to Christ. We have experienced his grace, his goodness, and we see the horizon, his glorious kingdom. May we determine to keep walking, trusting, rejoicing, heads up, eyes on Jesus in all things.