

Two Brothers, Two Views, Two Ends

A Study from Obadiah

September 27, 2009

Northwest Community Church

Introduction: Today I want you to meet one more Minor Prophet, adding to the four whom Pastor Dave has already presented. This prophet is one whom we know little about. In fact, all we can say for sure is that his name was Obadiah.

But Obadiah does have lessons to teach us about life and our outlook on it.

Obadiah is only 21 verses long in our English Bibles. We will only focus on some of those verses, but all carry a powerful word from God to those who will hear. So, let me encourage you, after listening to this message, to take a few moments at home and read all of Obadiah's vision.

The book of Obadiah is a vision about two brothers, two views, and two ends. The brothers are Jacob and Esau. The two views are ways to view the world. The two ends are the only two ends between which every person can choose for their future destiny.

Two Brothers

You won't fully understand Obadiah's vision if you're not familiar with Isaac's twin boys, Jacob and Esau and their story. And their story really starts with their grandfather, Abraham.

God made a covenant promise to Abraham telling him, ". . . in you all of the families of the earth shall be blessed." (Genesis 12:3) This covenant promise was primarily Messianic in nature. In other words, God had selected, on the basis of grace alone, Abraham & his heirs to be the family through which the Messiah, the Redeemer, would be born.

Such a covenant is only conveyed to one person in a generation at a time. In the culture of Abraham's day, that would be the firstborn. But then, God has a way of doing things that are counter-cultural. You remember, perhaps, that Abraham's first born was Ishmael, but he was not the one to inherit the covenant promise. That would be Abraham's second born son, Isaac.

Isaac, who is now the covenant bearer, married Rebekah, who like his mother was unable to have children. So Isaac pled with God for a child and when he was sixty Rebekah conceived, not one, but two children - in her womb.

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While pregnant with those twins, something more than the normal movements of a baby – in this case, two babies – in Rebekah's womb was going on that made her ask God in basic Hebrew, "What's up with this?"

God's reply to Rebekah gives us some insight into Obadiah's vision. God told her:

Two nations are in your womb,
Two peoples shall be separated from your body;
One people shall be stronger than the other,
And the older shall serve the younger. Genesis 25:23

So Esau and Jacob were born. Esau first then Jacob. Only one of them can be the next generation's covenant bearer. The culture says it will be Esau. God says, "Not so fast."

Like Abraham, God selects the individual He wants to be the covenant bearer. He makes this selection on the basis of grace. Now understand that this selection has nothing to do with eternal salvation. It does have everything to do with God's sovereign purposes.

Listen to the Apostle Paul as he explains this concept to the believers at Rome:

And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), it was said to her, "The older shall serve the younger." Romans 9:10-12

God's purpose for Jacob was to be the covenant bearer. With that purpose came a blessing different from the blessing that could be Esau's. But both boys, growing into manhood had the opportunity to love the Lord their God and to be blessed by God.¹

The last 8 verses of Genesis 25 informs us of how Jacob became the covenant bearer. It happened when Esau sold his birthright to his brother, Jacob. One day, Esau, because he was hungry, asked his brother for food. Jacob struck a deal with him – food in exchange for the

¹ I recommend Dr. Tom Constable's Bible study notes found at www.soniclight.com. Read his comments on Jacob & Esau in his commentaries on Genesis, Obadiah, Malachi, and Romans.

birthright. As far as Esau was concerned, that was a good deal. Bye-bye birthright, hello Big Mac! This just was not a big deal to Esau because the text tells us Esau despised his birthright - it had no value to him.

What did have value to him was the blessing of his father, Isaac. In contrast to the birthright which was primarily spiritual in nature, the father's blessing on the firstborn conferred primarily material possessions and with those possessions, immediate gratification.

Ah, but even the blessing of Isaac on the "firstborn" was taken from Esau by Jacob. In Genesis 27 we find the narrative of that event. Through deception Jacob receives the blessing from their father Isaac that was intended for Esau and when Esau discovers what happened, he reacts with hatred and a murderous threat toward Jacob as well as rebellion to his father, Isaac.

So deep is Esau's emotion, Rebekah their mother, pleads with Jacob to go into exile to protect himself. Years later, returning from that exile, Jacob encounters Esau. There appears to be a genuine reconciliation between the two brothers (see Genesis 33).

However, the way in which the descendants of Esau continued to relate to the descendants of Jacob makes me wonder just how Esau communicated his feelings to his heirs. Esau's descendants became the nation of Edom (see Genesis 25:30; 36:1, 43) while the descendants of Jacob became Israel. Edom and Israel . . .

From this point on in Israel's history, Edom was a perpetual problem for Israel (see Numbers 20:14-22; 2 Chronicles 21:8-10; 28:16-17). Read through the Old Testament and you will find that bitterness, envy & hatred toward Jacob's descendants was in the hearts of the descendants of Esau. This observation leads us to a spiritual principle that will be amplified in Obadiah: "Bitterness in your life not only causes you trouble, but corrupts others as well."

The writer of the New Testament letter to the Hebrews wrote,
 . . . looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God;
 lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by
 this many become defiled . . . Hebrews 12:15

It is no coincidence that the writer of this admonition had Esau in mind when he wrote this for you and me.

There is a reason the One Who created you and knows you best, has instructed,

Be angry, and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil. Ephesians 4:26-27

We are to deal immediately and in grace with those with whom we have a disagreement or have some legitimate reason to be angry. By doing so, we do not let the seed of bitterness put down roots. God gives you grace in THAT moment to deal with the issue.

But Esau did not partake of God's grace. Rather, he bitterly and incessantly griped and complained about the injustice done to him by Jacob. It is my opinion, that his grudge against Jacob was taken on by his descendants and Esau's root of bitterness troubled and defiled them and their bitterness was now focused on any descendant of Jacob. Like cancer left untreated, it could only destroy.

Those are the two brothers. Understanding that background now let's us better understand Obadiah's vision.

Obadiah's Vision

The text of Obadiah, other than the first verse, is God speaking directly to the nation of Edom and indirectly to His people – in this case Judah, the southern part of the divided kingdom.

Obadiah writes using a literary form known at that time as the "Covenant Lawsuit." The scene of judgment is described first. Then the judge speaks to the accused, laying out the allegations and, in this particular case, making it clear, that the allegations are substantiated and there is no defense to be made. Following these speeches by the judge, the guilt of the accused is pronounced along with the penalty.

So what we see in Obadiah is how the Lord God Almighty judges one particular nation. The lessons to be learned are many. Lessons like nothing is hidden from God's omniscience; military prowess fails to match God's omnipotence; vengeance belongs to God, the righteous Judge; the importance of nations relating properly to Israel; and more.

But we are limiting ourselves to three lessons. These lessons are related to the interaction between the two brothers, their two views of the world, and the two different ends for this life. To understand that better, we are going to read selected portions of the text.

Let's stand together as you listen to the reading of God's message to Edom.

(2) "Behold, I will make you small among the nations; you shall be greatly despised. (3) The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who dwell in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high; you who say in your heart, 'Who will bring me down to the ground?' (4) Though you ascend as high as the eagle, and though you set your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down," says the LORD.

(5) "If thieves had come to you, if robbers by night — oh, how you will be cut off — would they not have stolen till they had enough? If grape-gatherers had come to you, would they not have left some gleanings? (6) Oh, how Esau shall be searched out! How his hidden treasures shall be sought after!

(7) All the men in your confederacy shall force you to the border; the men at peace with you shall deceive you and prevail against you. Those who eat your bread shall lay a trap for you. No one is aware of it."

(8) "Will I not in that day," says the LORD, "even destroy the wise men from Edom, and understanding from the mountains of Esau? (9) Then your mighty men, O Teman, shall be dismayed, to the end that everyone from the mountains of Esau may be cut off by slaughter.

(10) "For violence against your brother Jacob, shame shall cover you, and you shall be cut off forever. (11) In the day that you stood on the other side — in the day that strangers carried captive his forces, when foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem — even you were as one of them.

(15) "For the day of the LORD upon all the nations is near; as you have done, it shall be done to you; your reprisal shall return upon your own head.

(17) "But on Mount Zion there shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness; the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions. (18) The house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame; but the house of Esau shall be stubble; they shall kindle them and devour them, and no survivor shall remain of the house of Esau," for the LORD has spoken.

(21) Then saviors shall come to Mount Zion to judge the mountains of Esau, and the kingdom shall be the LORD'S.

You heard the names of Esau and Jacob spoken — the two brothers. But they have been dead for almost a thousand years or more. These are the descendants ten centuries removed from the two brothers.

Because Edom — Esau's descendants — has acted toward Judah in sinful ways, the Lord GOD is declaring His judgment against them. All of which could have been avoided if bitterness had not been harbored in the soul

of Esau.

There is, of course, a deeper issue here. We will explore that issue when we look at the two ways you can view your world. But just make sure you don't miss this point: resolving conflict between you and another person — family or friend, is important. Left unresolved, you are in danger of creating, as it were, your own "Edom." Don't let that happen.

If you are harboring resentment, bitterness toward someone today, commit yourself to reconciling that relationship, asking for forgiveness, giving forgiveness, moving on in your life planting seeds of kindness rather than seeds of bitterness.

Don't let another day go by, fertilizing your bitterness and deepening its root system. Cut it off today!

Two Views

As I said a moment ago, there is a deeper issue here and it has to do with your worldview. Your worldview is important because it gives you a frame of reference for understanding how life works.

It is clear from the Judge's declaration in Obadiah's vision, that Edom considered itself to be far beyond the sorts of calamity which the Judge states will certainly come to pass. Edom had a militarily strategic geographic position from where it could defend itself with seemingly no consequence. Edom fancied itself above any kind of judgment seeing its position like that of the eagle whose lofty nest is difficult to attack. Edom also had strong political alliances with other nations. Edom's trust was in what it could see . . . the material, the temporal, the here and now.

Jacob and his descendants are characterized by a different way of seeing life . . . they were a people — imperfect for sure — but a people of faith, looking beyond what was seen to what was not seen because the object of their faith was the Lord GOD.

Obadiah's vision has two distinct statements that act, as it were, as bookends to the rest of the text. In the first verse we find, Thus says the Lord GOD . . . " and then in the final verse we find, And the kingdom shall be the LORD'S.

The title "the Lord GOD" speaks to the sovereign control of God. He is in control. He determines what ultimately matters. He is working out His plan, and when the dust settles, "the kingdom shall be the LORD'S." The point: GOD RULES! That's a worldview!

Underlying a worldview are at least four things:

- Who (or what) is in control?
- What ultimately matters in life?

- What is the end of all things?
- Where's my place in all of this?

And really, if you settle the first thing on that list – Who is in control? – the answers to the other three begin to fall into place. So who, or what, is in control? Obadiah records the answer in the last verse, . . . the kingdom shall be the LORD's!

Now Obadiah does not offer an apologetic for God. He just records God's statements. But when viewed through the lense of the whole of Scripture, we are confronted with this reality: God is, He has spoken, and what He has spoken has been recorded for our sakes so that we might . . . believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. (Hebrews 11:6)

Or not!

Those are your two options for worldviews: God's worldview or everything else!

The writer of Proverbs put it simply when contrasting God's view with everything else: There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death. (14:12; 16:25)

Jesus phrased it this way,

No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.
Matthew 6:24

Hey, did you catch that? Jesus said you "will be loyal to the one and despise the other". That word "despise" – where have you heard it before today? Why, it was used to describe Esau's attitude toward his birthright, the birthright he so willingly exchanged for a bite to eat.

Esau had a different worldview – one that left God out of the mix. He focused on satisfying temporal needs and trusting in his own resources for achievement in this life.

Jacob, although he was a scoundrel at times, his worldview was filtered through the eyes of faith, he believed God, taking God at His word about the covenant and the blessings that were part of that covenant.

We spend a great deal of time here at Northwest in God's Word learning to apply God's worldview because we know His view, His way, gives life meaning and purpose. And if you need it wrapped up in a neat package and tied with a bow, you really can't do a whole lot better than this month's memory verse. Say it with me:

He has told you, o man, what is good;
And what does the LORD require of you
But to do justice, to love kindness,
And to walk humbly with your God? Micah 6:8

Let's tie this concept of worldview a bit tighter to Obadiah's vision.

One purpose of God declaring His judgment on Edom was so that the people of God - in this case, the inhabitants of Judah – would know that (a) God is in control; (b) living by faith is worth it; and (c) the final outcome of all of this is "the kingdom shall be the LORD's." In verse 17, God says, "On Mount Zion, there shall be deliverance . . ." There will be an end to oppression and injustice. God will set all things right! The people of God will be vindicated!

God's worldview offers HOPE! God will vindicate His people. God will fulfill His promises. That has been and continues to be Israel's hope. And it is the hope of the church as well. The church, as the children of God, look forward to the realization of the apostle Peter's encouragement to persecuted believers in the 1st century:

. . . looking for . . . the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat. Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.
2 Peter 3:12-13

That is what God's worldview offers. Hope and a future! But what about the "leave God out" worldview? That question leads us to the third part of Obadiah's vision.

Two Ends

The two ends are the only two ends between which every person can choose for their future destiny.

The end for God's covenant people, and more to the point for believers in Jesus, based on the vision of Obadiah and other scripture, is that we can rejoice in the hope of the promises of our sovereign God. But the converse of our hope in God's promises is that there is judgment for those who have left God out – especially if they never received His gift of life through faith in Jesus Christ.

It is not a pretty picture. Earlier we read portions of the Judge's description and declaration of His judgement on Edom. It is complete, thorough, and final. It is an awful end from which there is no escape for the nation.

For sure, we need to be careful in seeing eternal condemnation to Hell in Obadiah. This passage is dealing with national identity. What we do see clearly is that God judges, He judges righteously, and He judges

thoroughly – nothing is hidden from His eyes. But because of what we know from other scripture, we do know that the character of God as judge applies to those who have rejected God's gift of life.

So my application is on these two ends – heaven or hell. Let me ask – do you know for certain that you have eternal life? If you don't know, please talk with me or one of the elders after the service today. We would love to show you from God's word how you can know for certain that you have eternal life.

If you do know you have eternal life, you can rest in the Lord's promises that He will come again and take you to be with Himself.

We also know from prophets such as Obadiah that there will be judgment against those who perpetrate all forms of wickedness and evil. You know, like that school yard bully or that irritating boss or that neighbor who was so annoying. And what about those involved in lifestyles which you know are wrong according to scripture. Or what about those guilty of genocide and ethnic cleansing? The list can continue to grow of those you believe will come under the judgment of our holy God.

Here's my "surprise" ending . . . I don't know about you, but sometimes when I read or hear about a person or people engaged in what I understand from scripture to be evil, I have a tendency to say, "Just wait, you're gonna get yours!"

This week while reading Obadiah, I realized that such an attitude, such a response is no better than the Edomites response to the troubles Judah encountered. We should not be guilty of responding to someone else's suffering, even if it is deserved. We are not to rejoice in another's suffering or even potential suffering, regardless of who they are.

"Why is that?" you might be thinking. Although the promise of judgment against wickedness gives us hope, the reality of such a judgment should cause somber reflection rather than snickering glee.

Here in this text, I believe we find God Himself reflecting on His own judgment . . . look at verse 5. God begins his description of what will occur and in mid-sentence, He stops, pauses, and comments on the utter devastation involved as if it caught Him by surprise. Did it? No! But we need to understand God is pure holiness and He is pure love. He is righteous and just yet He is merciful and gracious. His heart is grieved and broken over His creation. He takes no pleasure in judging, but judge He must.

And if the Judge of all the universe pauses and reflects over His judgment of others, should we not do the same?

Consider these two examples from the New Testament:

- Listen to Jesus . . . He is approaching Jerusalem near the end of His earthly ministry . . .

. . . He saw the city and wept over it, saying, "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another . . ." Luke 19:41-44

Jesus, more than anyone else, knew that the judgment was deserved but that did not keep him from weeping over Jerusalem's impending doom.

And just so you know, such compassion does not emasculate your faith and prevent you from doing what is righteous and holy. As soon as Jesus entered Jerusalem after those moments on the hill top, He chased the moneychangers out of the Temple!

- Now listen to one other voice from the early days of the church . . . his name is Stephen . . . he has just spoken to a group of Jews about Jesus. How did they respond? They forcefully removed Stephen from the city, picked up stones and began stoning him for his faith in Jesus.

Now Stephen could have just looked at his accusers and executioners and shouted, "Just wait! You're gonna get yours someday!" Instead, as stones pummeled his body, this is what he said, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin."

Someday do a Bible study of how the apostles encouraged persecuted believers in the early church. What you will find is the encouragement to hold fast to Jesus and His promises, the sure certainty that God will set all things right one day. Rejoice in that truth and be motivated to live today based on that hope.

You will also find that with that word of encouragement, there is an evangelistic thrust. We must realize that our hope as believers is conversely doom for those without Christ. Such knowledge should drive us to prayer, to live life in such a way as to draw the one without Christ to the Savior as we demonstrate a compassionate rather than a judgmental attitude.

Personally, I believe that what hinders many of us – including myself – from being more compassionate for those without Christ is that we

forget about mercy and grace.

We forget that if God gave us what we deserved – none of us would be here. It doesn't matter where you are in society or in what subdivision you live or how many letters are behind your name or how many checks you can write to various charitable causes. Apart from God's mercy, you wouldn't be here.

Mercy is God NOT giving us what we deserve. God has been merciful, has He not?

And not only has God been merciful, God has been gracious.

Grace is God giving me something I do NOT deserve. God did not need to send His Son to earth to die on the cross for my sins. We did not deserve that. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

Most of you know I'm involved in Financial Peace University. I encourage people to listen to Dave Ramsey on the radio because that is the way I first became acquainted with him. On the radio, it is not unusual for a caller to ask Dave how he is doing. His answer is always the same, "Better than I deserve."

The first time I heard him say that, I thought, "What?" Then I allowed myself to ponder what it was he was saying. Friends, we can all honestly say, we are better than we deserve. The only reason we are here today is because of God's mercy and grace.

Closing:

Two Brothers with Two World Views and Two Ends.

Today, deal with broken relationships where reconciliation has been elusive. Today, consider your ways regarding your worldview and make the needed changes to bring your life into agreement with God's view. Today, understanding that "the kingdom is the Lord's" begin living life in a way that reflects that hope, displaying compassion, and grace in such a way that the world around you knows, . . . the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world. (1 John 4:14)