

Minor Prophets' Major Gripes, IV

Obadiah on Smugness

June 15, 2003

THE LOST CITY OF EDOM

Obadiah is the shortest book in the OT; and little is known about the author other than his name means *Servant of God*. His message is known as a “dirge of doom”. But it’s not aimed at Israel; it’s aimed at a smug, rival-neighbor nation: Edom.

- They helped the Babylonians conquer Israel. (vs. 11)
- They killed the fleeing Israelite refugees. (vs. 14)
- They plundered Israel’s devastated remains. (vs. 13)

Obadiah reassures Israel that God is just, even in the midst of their discipline; and crimes against her will not go unpunished.

This is what the Sovereign LORD says about Edom ... “The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rocks and make your home on the heights, you who say to yourself, ‘Who can bring me down to the ground?’ Though you soar like the eagle and make your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down,” declares the LORD. – Obadiah 1:1-4 NIV

For centuries the lost city of Edom, carved “in the clefts of rocks,” was the stuff of legends and folklore. In fact ...

- Scholars debated Edom as a figment of Obadiah’s imagination.
- And many claimed it as a *proof* of scripture’s unreliability.

Then, in 1812 a young Swiss adventurer, Johann Burckhardt was winding his way through a narrow 1.5 mile gorge in the Sharra Mountains when he suddenly came upon an unbelievable sight.

- It was the very city that Obadiah had prophesied against.
- You may have seen it in Indiana Jones & the Last Crusade.

Actually, that’s the Temple of Khasneh which didn’t exist in Obadiah’s day. But much of Edom (a.k.a. Petra) did.

Q: Israel had many enemies; why was God so ticked off at Edom?

A: Unlike the others, Edom’s hostility was considered treason.

JACOB AND ESAU

Q: Remember when Esau gave up his birthright to his younger brother Jacob for a pot of stew?

Esau and Jacob jostled so much in their mother Rebekah's womb that she inquired of the Lord, "Why is this happening to me?"

The LORD said to [Rebekah] "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger." - Genesis 25:23 NIV

Q: Who do you suppose those two nations turned out to be?

Then the [Lord] said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel ["he struggles with God"] ..." - Genesis 32:28 NIV

Esau said to Jacob, "I'm starved! Give me some of that red stew you've made." (This was how Esau got his other name, Edom - "Red.") - Genesis 25:30 NIV

What began as a rivalry between two brothers, ended up as a perpetual feud between two nations.

- The Edomites even refused to let Israel pass through their country on their way to the Promised Land (Num 20:14-21).

The Edomites should have been the first to rush to the aid of their brother-nation; but instead they gloated and celebrated.

Remember, O LORD, what the Edomites did on the day Jerusalem fell. "Tear it down," they cried, "tear it down to its foundations!" - Psalm 137:7 NIV

And so Obadiah proclaimed to the descendants of Esau:

... your friends will deceive and overpower you ... Because of the violence against your brother Jacob, you will be covered with shame; you will be destroyed forever.
- Obadiah 1:7;10 NIV

The Babylonians returned and overthrew Edom. Israel survives as a nation; but all that's left of Edom is a tourist attraction. And yet, the way Edom treated Israel wasn't the root of the problem, it was the proof of a much deeper issue:

The arrogance of your heart has deceived you ... - Obadiah 1:3 NAS

It was their smug, self-sufficiency that really ticked God off.

WEALTH AND WISDOM

They thought their wealth and wisdom would preserve them.

- There is no lasting security apart from the Lord

This is why God brought them down; and why He specifically vowed to pillage their treasures (wealth) and destroy their wise-men.

But how Esau will be ransacked, his hidden treasures pillaged! ... "In that day," declares the LORD, "will I not destroy the wise men of Edom, men of understanding in the mountains of Esau? – *Obadiah 1:6-8 NIV*

Esau's descendants became smug; placing their trust in wealth and wisdom *instead* of in the Lord.

Q: How can we tell when we're being smug like the Edomites?

Q: How do we know if we're guilty of placing our trust, security, and confidence in wealth and wisdom instead of God?

Q: How much can you have in the bank?

Q: Is it OK to craft elaborate plans?

Q: Can you have homeowners insurance?

Scripture calls us to be good stewards, to plan wisely, *and* to have a trust and fear in the Lord all the while.

- We must have an approach that is practical yet dependent

Q: How? Do I just have a "feeling" of trust?

A: No. There are practical actions of trust.

THE TRUST TEST: WEALTH

I'll give you a simple little trust test. You can keep track of your score on your fingers; for each question score yourself.

0 for *Never* 1 for *sometimes* 2 for *a lot*

1. Are you ever dishonest or unethical for financial gain?

Even a slight compromise of God's principles reveals a misplaced priority of goods over God.

2. Do you give a consistent proportion back to the Lord?

Viewing wealth as an entrustment rather than an entitlement strongly demonstrates a dependence on faith over funds.

3. Do you hoard stuff? (Can you ever save *enough*?)

[Jesus said] ... a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions. –
Luke 12:15 NIV

Q: Have you found the joy and freedom that comes from getting rid of stuff?!

4. Are you eager to get rich for the sake of being rich?

Wealth is not the ultimate achievement in life; serving God and others with our abilities, interests, and resources is.

THE TRUTH TEST: WISDOM

That's wealth. If you have no fingers left, you did your math wrong, and you should come up for prayer after the service! remember your number and clear your hands for wisdom.

1. Do you ever manipulate others for your own benefit?

It's okay to try to influence someone while respecting their views; it's not okay to coerce them into your point of view.

2. Do you ever use your wits to justify sinful actions?

Without God's Word to keep us in check and recalibrate our thinking, we have an amazing ability to justify ANYTHING.

3. Do you seek God's conformation on ideas and decisions?

He's given us His Word and the council of His people to help us ensure that we're listening to His voice.

4. When you argue, is it to find truth or to win?

Q: When you find someone more intelligent, are you threatened?

Q: Would you rather share thoughts or demonstrate superiority?

Your score can only be interpreted by you and God's Holy Spirit. The Lord just won't tolerate being substituted, ignored, or mocked by smug human independence.

- Obadiah, the Edomites, and Indiana Jones remind us of that.