

COMPASSION FOR LOST PEOPLE

Obadiah 1-17

We live in a time where we have seen acts of great compassion and mercy where people will risk their lives to help people whom they don't even know. Yet at this same time we have seen acts of unbelievable cruelty and destruction such as happened in Los Angeles riots, the events of 9-11, Cambodia, Vietnam, the holocaust in Germany, the Rwandan genocide, and it continues throughout the Middle East even today. Sometimes those who commit such heinous acts seem to just get away with it and nothing happens to them. When we see such things, we wonder: "Where is justice? Is there no justice for some?" Justice is served when there is protection for those who do what is right and when there is punishment for those who do what is wrong. Justice becomes effective only when someone has the authority and power to deliver the protection and the punishment.

By now we have discovered that we live in an imperfect world. We see aberrations where justice is not served and our sense of fairness is offended. Such aberrations of justice have gone on since the beginning of human existence. The message that comes to us from God is that eventually justice will be satisfied. The "law of the harvest" (as you sow, so shall you reap) is an eternal law and the fulfillment of that law will take place in time and/or eternity. We have this assurance from the only One Who has the authority and power to provide universal and eternal justice. We get away with nothing and no good work will go unrewarded. For those who do well this is a comfort and for those who do evil this truth should be a terrible dread of what awaits them in the future.

God has provided warnings to everyone and has provided enough examples of His judgments in time to assure us that His judgments in eternity are sure. The history of the nation of Israel provides many examples of how the judgement of God brought punishment (chastisement) but not annihilation to that nation and this history also includes how God brought punishment and annihilation to those who were not His people for their cruelty and injustice toward Israel.

There is a lesson for us who are Christians. Israel did not escape punishment when they continued in sin, however, they were not annihilated or cast away from the presence of God. Those who rejected God (the heathen) also received punishment when they continued in sin but they were annihilated. As Christians we will be judged and must give an account for every deed and every idle word; however, we will be "saved" from destruction. Those who have not become part of the family of God by the new birth will also be judged and they will be cast into hell, where the fires are never quenched.

When the airplanes hit the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001, many in various Muslim nations were celebrating in the streets and were glad that this disaster had happened. Could we say that gloating over the misfortune of others is a natural reaction? Apparently, it is a natural reaction if we hate or dislike or even if we are envious of others. If we really cared about others, then we would have empathy for those who experience misfortune and those who are suffering. Jesus commented on this "natural reaction" in the Sermon on the Mount. He said, "You have heard it said 'love our neighbors and hate our enemies', but I say to you, 'love your enemies, also'." That is NOT a natural reaction! Could we say that it is a supernatural reaction?

So where do we find ourselves with regard to attitudes toward others?

Watch out for Arrogance – 1-4

¹The vision of Obadiah. Thus says the Lord GOD concerning Edom— We have heard a report from the LORD, And

an envoy has been sent among the nations *saying*, “Arise and let us go against her for battle”—² “Behold, I will make you small among the nations; You are greatly despised.”³ “The arrogance of your heart has deceived you, You who live in the clefts of the rock, In the loftiness of your dwelling place, Who say in your heart, ‘Who will bring me down to earth?’”⁴ “Though you build high like the eagle, Though you set your nest among the stars, From there I will bring you down,” declares the LORD. Obadiah 1-4 (NASB95)

God has not left the world in ignorance of what the consequences of our actions will be. God has provided messengers and has communicated His promises to people through those we recognize as prophets. Sometimes the message from God was seen in a vision as in the case of Obadiah. Many of the prophecies that God gave concerned not only Israel but also the neighbors of Israel. Edom was to the south and east of Israel. The Edomites were the descendants of Esau, the brother of Jacob. Just as there was rivalry between Esau and Jacob, there continued to be rivalry between their descendants. Even when Israel was under attack from the Philistines and then later on by the Babylonians, the Edomites showed no compassion for their kin folks and even turned refugees over to the Babylonians. They gloated over the down fall of Israel.

Obadiah spoke for God regarding what would happen to Edom. The message was that the other heathen nations would conspire together to destroy the nation of Edom. It is very likely that Obadiah’s message was never heard by those who lived in Edom. Instead it was to provide comfort and consolation for the Jews who had been betrayed by their ancient kinsmen.

You’ve heard the express of “being cut down to size.” That was what the message was to Edom. They were a proud people who thought that their homeland was totally safe because of its location. This was a feeling of false security. They lived in an area about 50 miles south of the Dead Sea in the mountains that were accessible only by narrow passages that could easily be defended. They boasted about their security but they were not safe from the judgement of God.

Judgment Will Come – 5-9

⁵ “If thieves came to you, If robbers by night— O how you will be ruined!— Would they not steal *only* until they had enough? If grape gatherers came to you, Would they not leave *some* gleanings?”⁶ “O how Esau will be ransacked, *And* his hidden treasures searched out!”⁷ “All the men allied with you Will send you forth to the border, And the men at peace with you Will deceive you and overpower you. *They who eat* your bread Will set an ambush for you. (There is no understanding in him.)”⁸ “Will I not on that day,” declares the LORD, “Destroy wise men from Edom And understanding from the mountain of Esau?”⁹ “Then your mighty men will be dismayed, O Teman, So that everyone may be cut off from the mountain of Esau by slaughter. Obadiah 5-9 (NASB95)

For a long time, we thought that we in our nation were safe because of the oceans on the east and west coasts and by having friendly neighbors to the north and south. Then we had ICBMs and loss of border security which allowed entry to those who wanted to do harm to us.

The judgment against Edom would be carried out in several different ways. The first way would be by thieves and robbers. Ordinary thieves would only take what they could readily find that was needed to satisfy their immediate needs but those who would strike Edom would take everything including the not so obvious treasures. In other words, the loss that Edom would experience would be total.

Normally, those who steal and rob are those who are not well known. In the case of Edom, the destruction would come from their so-called allies and those with whom they had treaties and agreements. The attacks would come without warning as in an ambush and no one would have anticipated it happening.

Could something like this happen today to our nation? We’ve taken precautions against those who might try to burglarize our homes. We have alarm systems, locks on the doors, and neighborhood watch programs. If a thief were to break in and steal from us, they would take TVs and smart phones, tools and other things that could be easily sold in flea markets but they

would not find the “hidden” treasures.

We are now starting to see people who can go way beyond simple burglary and they can steal your identity and empty your bank account and steal your other assets – the hidden treasures. Add to that those who are supposed to be looking out for us (the government) printing money which diminishes the value of everything we own. Those who have been helping people live the good life by extending credit have set a trap for the nation and we could fall into a debt chasm that would be a total collapse of the world economic system. When it happens, few will see it coming and even those who have put their trust in gold and silver will find its value to be a small fraction of what they imagined it to be.

In addition to the loss of things and wealth that could be brought about by unscrupulous people, by banks, and even by our government, we might find a leadership vacuum in our culture and people will repeatedly make senseless decisions that will add to the weakening and eventual destruction of the nation. This is what God said that He would do to Edom in verse eight. How many times have we heard the complaint that we can’t find any statesmen and we can’t find anyone with true leadership (read that as wisdom) who could lead the nation who might be able to get elected?

In 1 Samuel 16:14 we see the following: “But the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD troubled him.” Since our nation has adopted an anti-God and anti-Christ culture in its policies, we have been experiencing (as a nation) what happened to Saul. God has apparently sent a spirit of stupidity and immorality upon our nation and many have lost the ability to make wise decisions in choosing our leaders.

After the economic loss and the lack of wisdom in leadership the final straw that led to the collapse of Edom was a deterioration of their military strength. In verse nine the reference to “might men” meant their army. The problem was identified as their being “dismayed.” This could be translated as afraid, confounded or amazed. Without clear leadership and a sense of purpose, these emotions would be an expected outcome. With an ever-changing strategy or no strategy at all, a military force could be expected to be confused, amazed and even frightened.

Mercy and Grace Required – 10-14

¹⁰ “Because of violence to your brother Jacob, You will be covered *with* shame, And you will be cut off forever. ¹¹ “On the day that you stood aloof, On the day that strangers carried off his wealth, And foreigners entered his gate And cast lots for Jerusalem— You too were as one of them. ¹² “Do not gloat over your brother’s day, The day of his misfortune. And do not rejoice over the sons of Judah In the day of their destruction; Yes, do not boast In the day of *their* distress. ¹³ “Do not enter the gate of My people In the day of their disaster. Yes, you, do not gloat over their calamity In the day of their disaster. And do not loot their wealth In the day of their disaster. ¹⁴ “Do not stand at the fork of the road To cut down their fugitives; And do not imprison their survivors In the day of their distress. Obadiah 10-14 (NASB95)

There is no clear date for the prophecy of Obadiah. Some place it in the time of around 800 B.C. during the reign of Jehoshaphat when Edom, in an alliance with others, raided Israel. Others think it was written during the time around 580 B.C. which would be when Babylon was about to destroy Jerusalem. In verses ten and eleven, it seems as if Obadiah was writing about past events and starting in verse twelve he seems to be referencing events that were underway or would occur in the future.

The reason for the judgment of God on Edom was because of the way they had treated (or would treat) the people of Israel. Instead of showing *compassion* on Israel when they were under attack from Babylon, they were “aloof” or just stood by and watch it without trying to help the Jews. They celebrated the destruction of Jerusalem and bragged about how they had escaped what the Jews were receiving from Babylon.

Twice the term “gloat” was used to describe how they felt about the descendants of Jacob. They even ambushed the Israelites who were fleeing the battle and killed them or captured them and turned them over to the Babylonians. Before Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians it was under siege for 18 months. The neighboring nations knew what was happening and the people of Edom took a lot of pleasure in seeing what was happening to Jerusalem. After the Babylonian plunder of the land of Israel, the Edomites moved in to take what they could. The judgement of God for such lack of compassion was that the Edomites would be treated the same way that the Israelites were treated; however, there would be a difference. The Jews were eventually restored to their land but the Edomites would be cut off forever. The plunder of Edom would be complete and total.

In verse three God mentioned the arrogance or pride of the Edomites and in verse ten we see that their pride would turn into shame.

Expect Retribution – 15-16

¹⁵ “For the day of the LORD draws near on all the nations. As you have done, it will be done to you. Your dealings will return on your own head. ¹⁶ “Because just as you drank on My holy mountain, All the nations will drink continually. They will drink and swallow And become as if they had never existed. Obadiah 15-16 (NASB95)

In verse fifteen we see the predicted judgment of Edom being applicable to all nations. Many times in the Scriptures we see God bring judgment upon a specific town or nation and others who sin in the same manner seem to escape judgment. What we are seeing in these accounts are warnings and wake up calls for all the rest of the world. The examples given in Scriptures are meant to tell us how God views and deals with sin and what the judgment will eventually be. From the example of Ananias and Sapphira we learned in Acts chapter four how God regards hypocrisy even though all hypocrites do not immediately die.

All the world should learn the lessons of the consequences of arrogance and pride that we find in Obadiah’s prophecy about Edom. There will be a “day of the Lord” or judgment day for everyone. No one is exempt. The judgment that will be applied is shown in two parts. The first is God’s judgment in time or eternity and the formula is “as you have done, it will be done to you.” The second part seems to be more in the realm of eternity and that is the nations who are prideful and arrogant will become as if they never existed.

Live in Hope – 17

¹⁷ “But on Mount Zion there will be those who escape, And it will be holy. And the house of Jacob will possess their possessions. Obadiah 17 (NASB95)

Here we see the contrast of those who belong to God and those who do not belong to Him. Those who continue to defy and disobey God will be utterly destroyed and to those who seek the Lord and are His, God promises restoration. God promised to send salvation to His people and the message of salvation is also a message of condemnation for those who reject God.

In the final outcome, God’s kingdom of righteousness and holiness will have the victory and justice will prevail. Those who are violent and wicked will reap the harvest of their actions and will be destroyed. Many people live in a sense of security and think that problems or judgement cannot bother them, however, they may run but they cannot hide from God.