

THE BOOK OF OBADIAH
Lesson 5, Chapter 1 Continued 4

The Book of Obadiah offers 3 different perspectives on its main subject, which is what God intends to do to Edom (the nation of Jordan being modern day Edom). I think to make this prophecy more relevant for modern folks, it would almost be better to cross out the word "Edom" and substitute the word "nations", but we probably shouldn't because we'd lose much meaning and critical historical background. Nonetheless, without doubt Edom is being spoken of both as an individual nation and as a representative type of the gentile nations of the world, just as the New Testament tends to use Babylon in that same way.

The first perspective that is offered was contained in our study of verses 1 – 10 that deals with Edom as a separate and distinct nation founded by Jacob (Israel's) twin brother Esau. It speaks of both the Edom of the past and the Edom (Jordan) of the future (the future from viewpoint of the time of Obadiah). The perspective is that God is going to use the nations of the world to attack and destroy Edom, effectively removing it as a sovereign nation.

The second perspective comes from verses 12 – 15, which not only deals with Edom as an individual nation but also in the context of the other nations of the world, and it implies that what all of these nations have been doing against Israel, and what they should not do in the future, will bring down upon them wrath of God. Yet, there is the faintest hope that if they were to reverse course and stop doing it, perhaps some or all could avoid complete extermination.

The third perspective is what we have just begin in verse 16...that takes on a more explicit nature of its own beginning at verse 18... which says that Edom (and probably the nations of the world, or at least the nations immediately surrounding Israel) will suffer annihilation by the hand of Israel, who is really but an agent of Yehoveh, God of Israel.

Many able Bible commentators and theologians attempt to harmonize these 3 perspectives into a single unified one because they fear they conflict with one another. Some theorize that perhaps each of these perspectives was written by a different author (even though they are in the minority and I think their

arguments fall to the floor because Obadiah has such inner consistency and conformity). I liken these 3 perspectives to what I call walking around the rock. That is, if one were to happen across a large room-sized boulder, and then begin to walk around its circumference to examine it and then explaining what it looks like, there will be differences in appearance of color, texture, and features depending on where you are standing at the moment. And yet, the boulder is still just one monolithic piece of rock and not multiple pieces that have been fused together. To lose sight of that reality would be to lose sight of truth.

To somewhat summarize what we've studied so far, the divine wrath that is going to be visited upon Edom (and ultimately on the nations that the word Edom typifies), is an event that is termed The Day of Yehoveh, or the Day of the Lord. Further, because this Day of the Lord is mentioned in a number of prophecies including those of Ezekiel and Jeremiah among others, we readily see that it is a day that is future to Obadiah, and it is still future to us. Although for Obadiah that future can be counted in centuries, in our day I suspect it can be counted in years (and not very many). The other understanding that we must never lose sight of is that except in the rarest of occasions, God uses humans to bring about His wrath. In the case of Edom, those humans He will use are the Israelis.

Let's pick up by first re-reading verses 16 – 21.

RE-READ OBADIAH 1:16 – 21

The first 3 of these verses are spoken to Judah. The first verse has always fascinated Bible scholars because of the terms drunk and drink. Before we address that in more detail, it is better that we again visit the Book of Jeremiah that also deals with Edom, and it gives us yet another perspective as we continue our walk around the rock. Open your Bibles to Jeremiah chapter 49.

READ JEREMIAH 49:7 – 22

What I want you to notice are the words of verse 12:

CJB Jeremiah 49:12 ¹² For this is what ADONAI says: "Those who do not deserve to drink from this cup will have to drink it anyway, so should you go unpunished? No, you will not go unpunished; you will certainly drink it."

Added to the words drunk and drink from Obadiah verse 16 are the words "from this cup" of Jeremiah 49:12. Let's examine exactly what this is supposed to indicate to us. And, I remind you of perhaps the principle underlying premise of the Hebrew Roots approach to teaching the Bible that directly applies here: what those words and verses ought to mean to us are exactly what they meant to the people that wrote them and heard them all those centuries ago. The issue, then, is what exactly did those thoughts mean to those people of the ancient past who lived in such a wildly different culture than those of us (especially in the developed West) who live in modern times? And, I once again want to give much credit to Paul Raabe for the stellar research he did on this subject matter, as well as a few others who have contributed so significantly to my understanding of this important phrase.

When we put together these several terms to form the phrase "drinking the cup of wrath" (something I have heard Christian pastors speak of so many times) we of course realize that what it is, is a very powerful metaphor. What is a metaphor? We were all taught this in High School or even earlier; but I can tell you that what we learned was overly simplistic. First, metaphor is not mere word substitution. I.A. Richards in his inciteful book *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* says this: "*When we use a metaphor we have two thoughts of different things active together and supported by a single word or phrase, whose meaning is a result of their interaction*". I know that might seem a little like word salad, but the essence of what he is saying can be captured in one of the most iconic metaphors in Western Culture, "don't let the cat out of the bag". We all know that this means not to accidentally or on purpose make something known that someone doesn't want to be known. So, we have two different things that are active: first, a cat in a bag, and second, our intent of getting it across to someone to be careful not to reveal a secret or an intended surprise. And, yet these two different actions are brought together in order to communicate the same thing.

I want to use this particular example because it explains the matter of metaphor on two levels. First, when this cat-in-the-bag metaphor was historically first

expressed and came into general use, it was about something entirely different than what we think of it today. And, if we are honest, when we think about it the cat-in-a-bag image makes no sense at all. Today, what are the cartoons and images we have in our minds when that phrase is spoken? It is of a feline...a kitty-cat... that for some reason finds itself inside of a cloth bag, and for some other reason we have to be careful not to let it out. Why? Why is that cat in that bag in the first place, and what's so bad about it escaping? How does that thought equate to not revealing a secret or something said in confidence? It doesn't. It doesn't have the slightest connection nor does it seem to have any inherent meaning. This is because when that metaphor was first coined it had nothing to do with a kitty-cat but rather with a whip... the infamous cat-of-nine-tails... used to discipline sailors in the Royal Navy. By tradition it was kept in a red bag. So, to let the cat out of the bag meant that the cat of nine tails would be taken from storage, removed from its storage bag, and then used to whip a sailor as punishment. At least that thought makes sense. But, how is that relative to revealing a secret? In the minds of those who used this metaphor the reason that a sailor was being whipped was that a fellow sailor revealed something (he tattled) that got the recipient of the whipping into trouble. So, to not let the cat out of the bag meant for one sailor to not reveal anything about a fellow sailor that might get him into trouble, thus getting them whipped. Now we see how that metaphor makes so much more sense in relation to the message it intends to deliver. The message is: keep quiet and keep the secret because there could be a very painful consequence.

Another important principle about the use of metaphor (that can be equally applied to simile) is this as it especially concerns reading the Bible. As hard as it can perhaps be to swallow, sometimes taking the meaning of a biblical phrase as metaphor is far superior to taking it literally. And, the easiest way to know when a biblical phrase is meant as metaphor, or simile, or more broadly simply as a cultural expression, is when it makes little sense to us when taken literally. Or even more, when taken literally that phrase is obviously false on its face, or even utterly incoherent. Let me give you an example from the New Testament. In the Book of James, we read the following (and I'll use the NAS version because it is the most commonly heard).

^{NAS} **James 2:10** *For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.*

In other words, if taken literally it means that if I break only one commandment then it is the same as if I've broken all of the other commandments. The implication being there is no point to even trying to obey the entire Law of Moses because it is futile. This has been spun in a number of ways but mostly to say that this why the Law of Moses has been abolished by Christ. Never mind that such a meaning isn't even within the context of what is being said. From a more fundamental level I want us all to stop and think about that statement. Are we to seriously think that if we were to break but one of God's commandments, no matter what it is, that He sees us and judges us as if we broke all 613 of them? Or, on another level, are we to take this to mean that breaking one of His laws in essence does away with all other of God's laws and commands? Frankly, either notion is absurd. If we drive 45 mph in a 35-mph speed zone and are caught and fined, does this mean that in that one indiscretion we have broken all the hundreds of traffic laws on the books and will be judged guilty of violating them all? Or that this one violation results in all traffic laws on the books are now abolished so that there are none? Of course not. It's not logical or rational, and so it cannot be literally true because nothing else in the Bible, Old or New Testaments, makes any such similar illogical suggestion. Rather, taking this to mean that the Law of Moses is abolished if we break one law is but a misguided attempt to understand something literally that was actually meant to be taken metaphorically or perhaps as but a cultural expression. Taking it literally, and spinning it to make sense of it when no literal sense works, also helps to fulfill a common agenda of the gentiles-only Constantinian Church. Rather, what this metaphor or expression meant to the writer of the Book of James is that we must not take God's laws and commands as relative, and so somehow believe that my sins are small, but yours are bigger and so I deserve a better judgment from God than do you. Or that, as expressed in these verses, that although I murdered someone at least I have not committed adultery, so I have some rationale for being a better person before God as a murderer than as an adulterer. Bottom line: clearly these words if taken literally make no sense in practice, and so it is actually an expression.

The point I'm making is that the phrase "drinking from the cup of wrath" was also based on a commonly understood metaphorical meaning in the biblical era that is far removed from us, and so we need to rediscover from this metaphorical comparison what it intended to bring to mind to the speaker and hearer, especially since in modern times we know that it applies to events of the End Times. So, what I'm asking you do (so far as you are able) is to erase what you have always envisioned about that phrase and begin anew.

The words drinking and cup are meant to invoke the image of wine drinking, and all that it entails and all that it embodies both good and bad. So, the idea is that "drinking the cup of Yehoveh's wrath" is meant to make the subject of how one *experiences* divine wrath better understood by using the instrument of drinking from a cup of wine as a symbolic representation. I'll say this in a different way: drinking wine from a cup, and drinking the cup of Yehoveh's wrath have similarities in their outcomes and in what the drinker experiences. But how? In what ways are they similar?

Let's disassemble this phrase, looking at each word, before we put it back together again. The English word "cup" is in Hebrew ***kos***. It's just what you think it is: a vessel for holding wine and then drinking from it. One of the common uses for the term cup in the Bible is to metaphorically describe a person's fate or destiny, or as someone's allotted portion. This can be in the form of a curse or a blessing, or it can bring abundance or it can bring disaster. Psalm 116 gives us a good example of this.

CJB Psalm 116:12-14 ***¹² How can I repay ADONAI for all his generous dealings with me? ¹³ I will raise the cup of salvation and call on the name of ADONAI. ¹⁴ I will pay my vows to ADONAI in the presence of all his people***

In verse 13 the Psalmist wants to glorify God for the gift of salvation...salvation is the portion or perhaps destiny that Yehoveh has allotted to him. It comes from the cup that is the vessel that figuratively holds salvation.

The second word to look at is wine. In Hebrew most often it is ***yayin***, a few times it is ***tirosh***. There are a few other terms used to denote new wine, strong drink, etc., but we don't need to get into that at the moment. What is interesting is that

we find in several places in the Bible the topic of mixing wine. Mixing wine means to add spices to it to change the flavor a little.

If you are in, or come from, the more traditional Christian Church environment, it is not unusual for it to be taught that the wine that Jesus used, or that was the result of His miracle at a wedding in Cana in which He turned water into wine, was actually non-alcoholic grape juice. That's simply false. Wine was part of every Jew's diet, rich or poor. The only difference was probably in quantity and certainly in quality. And, as in both the Old and New Testaments, it was used by the Temple priests as well as by the average Jew during festive occasions.

Wine is actually portrayed as a good and positive thing. The only reason that since late in the 19th century that wine and all liquor got a bad name was because of its growing misuse, and the rise of the Women's Temperance League that eventually resulted in the Prohibition era in the USA. For you younger folks, Prohibition speaks to a few years from 1920 to 1933 when all alcoholic beverages were outlawed. But biblically, wine use was not just fine but actually ordained, and young children drank wine diluted with water. It was meant to bring joy, dull pain, and was simply a very pleasant tasting beverage. But, the Scriptures also speak of the downside of wine drinking such as drunkenness. And, this is critical for us to grasp because it is the drunkenness aspect that is at the center of understanding what "drinking from the cup of Yehoveh's wrath" is meaning.

Next, let's talk about the word drink or drinking. Generally speaking, unless the subject clearly is the drinking of water, the term drink or drinking is speaking of consuming wine or some other stronger alcoholic beverage. When the term is used by itself without including what it is that the person is drinking, it is most often associated with one of the following 3 things.

First, it has to do with slaughter. This could be as when Israel defeats an enemy and is said to "drink the blood of the slain". The same could be said when a predatory animal like a lion kills and devours its prey. Second, it is figurative speech for wicked behavior. Sometimes in the Bible we'll read of a wicked person drinking, meaning they are enjoying the fruits of their wickedness. The Book of Job gives us an example of this.

CJB Job 15:15-16 ***¹⁵ God doesn't trust even his holy ones; no, even the heavens are not innocent in his view. ¹⁶ How much less one loathesome and corrupt, a human being, who drinks iniquity like water.***

There's a couple of places where we read of drinking sin like water. Or how the violence done by the wicked is their meat and drink.

And third, it has to do with human pain.

CJB Proverbs 26:6 ***Telling a message to a fool and sending him out is like cutting off one's feet and drinking violence.***

The idea in Job is when someone sends a fool as a messenger they are likely to receive an end result that is suffering and bitterness. The greater point is that this suffering is brought about by Yehoveh.

Now we'll move to the word drunkenness. Drinking wine is a pleasant and positive experience of receiving blessing. But, drunkenness is condemned in the harshest terms. We all know, and the Bible warns, that as good as drinking wine can be, some cannot stop and they overdo it. The more one drinks, the more uninhibited one becomes, and the more prone to do things that are clearly irrational and destructive. Once this stage is reached, the person doing the drinking is labeled as a drunkard.

CJB Proverbs 23:31-35 ***³¹ Don't gaze at the red wine as it gives its color to the cup. It may glide down smoothly now; ³² but in the end, it bites like a serpent-yes, it strikes like a poisonous snake. ³³ Your eyes will see peculiar things; your mind will utter nonsense. ³⁴ You will feel as if lying on the waves of the sea or sprawled on top of the mast- ³⁵ "They hit me, but I didn't feel it! They beat me up, and I didn't even know it! When will I wake up?... I'll go get another drink."***

The results of drinking too much can be stupor. This generates confusion, staggering around, making bad decisions, and excessive sleep. Judgment is abandoned. And yet, drinking wine is recommended for those who are dying or terribly distressed because it induces forgetfulness and a numbness to one's condition. But for an otherwise normal person, drinking too much wine can

literally make a person go crazy. And, while drinking wine can be good to relieve pain, on the other hand it can be detrimental because pain is our body's way of warning us that something bad or dangerous is happening to us.

^{NAS} **Proverbs 26:9** *Like a thorn which falls into the hand of a drunkard, So is a proverb in the mouth of fools.*

So, here in Proverbs the idea is that a person who is drunk on wine and is stuck with a thorn doesn't notice the sensation of pain and thus doesn't know they've been injured, which is comparable to a fool who tries to misuse a Proverb to explain his/her action but is simply unaware they are saying something foolish or doing something that can result in harm to themselves or others.

Being drunk can make one helpless. They can be so drunk that they don't recognize danger, and can become an easy target for criminals or can be easily overrun by an enemy. One famous Bible story that well highlights this happens in 1Kings when Zimri, the servant of Israel's king Elah, attacked and murdered the king who had been drinking himself drunk and so made himself helpless.

And, drinking to excess can make a person become disgraced...usually by doing something grossly inappropriate if not perverted such that his reputation is ruined. Does a day go by that in one media source or another we don't read of a celebrity who blames an immoral act on being drunk or high, as though somehow it is not they that have committed the act but rather some alcohol or drug? Or of somehow who drinks and drives and kills someone and once they have slept it off they don't even remember the incident, and ask a judge or jury to show mercy since they didn't mean to do harm so shouldn't be held accountable?

So, in all these explanations and examples we can see exactly how we are meant to understand the nature of cup, drinking, wine, and drunkenness. These are to be compared to the experience a wicked person or nation suffers when they are under God's wrath. It's the terrible effects of what it is like to suffer God's wrath that are embodied in the similar effects of drinking too much wine. And, without doubt, we shouldn't be so literal and narrow as to believe that this only applies to drinking wine. In modern application any strong drink, or any illicit drug that causes one to get drunk or high can be substituted. And... pay attention to this...

the effects of being in a drunken or high stupor are never isolated. Every aspect of our humanity can be affected; our emotions, our behavior, our minds, and what we do to our friends, family, and often people we don't even know.

In the end, we find that in the Holy Scriptures the cup of wrath comes exclusively from Yehoveh and He personally directs the process of exactly what happens to individuals and nations that fall under that wrath. The wrath is always aimed at the deserving. Yet, on earth there is inevitably collateral damage because that is the nature of humanity. It seems, though, that in the End Times there will be a one-time exception for the righteous, who will not suffer the effects of God's wrath. This goes by the name The Rapture, but what exactly that *experience* is going to be is very hard to tell from what little information is given about it. What is interesting (and it is something that I taught some time ago), is that the prophetic word itself is what sets God's wrath into motion on earth. That is, these prophetic words we have read are far more than just a warning of doom; they are like pressing the ENTER key on a computer keyboard. The giving of the prophecy is also the way a fulfillment is executed. Once God speaks it to a Prophet, in Heaven it is a done deal. On earth it is also a done deal that just hasn't happened yet, because its time hasn't come. Folks, understand: all these prophecies about Edom (Jordan) and all the nations on earth being annihilated in the End Times has already been set into motion. It is not stoppable, and nothing can delay it. The end is determined. It is like a Hurricane that was predicted, but now is moments from making landfall on the coastal town in which you live. If one waits too long to prepare for it, then it is comparable to being a drunkard who cannot see danger because of the stupor they are in, and so all that is left for them to experience is the moment of their calamity or destruction. Therefore, once again, I plead with you to prepare for what the Prophets say is coming because the mere fact that the Prophets have spoken means the match has been struck and the fuse has been lit. We're just not exactly sure how long or short the detonator cord is. But the explosion is assured.

As concerns the End Times, God's wrath is going to fall on the nations through the agency of Israel, or in defense of Israel, or perhaps both. Either way, while Israel has experienced God's wrath in times past, this time they won't; rather, it's the nations that will. What is the cause of God's wrath against the nations? Their hostility or ambivalence towards Israel. The End Times will put an end to

the nations of the world as we know them today and it will be permanent. In a strange twist that bothers Christian theologians and denominational leaders to the point that most refuse to face it, there is no call to repentance in these prophecies, nor is there any amount of repentance that will forestall the prophesied wrath. We've run into this notion before concerning Israel, and especially as concerns the former Northern Kingdom of Israel. That is, in both Hosea and Amos we learn that the Northern Kingdom had crossed over some cosmic line in the sand in which there was no return. No amount of repentance was going to save the Kingdom from God's earthly agent of His wrath, Assyria. Essentially, then, the purpose of the prophecy as a pronouncement of doom was to both tell Ephraim/Israel why they were going to be destroyed and it gave the relative few who still listened and heeded Yehoveh the opportunity to prepare. The preparation, history shows, was mainly in the form of trusting God by voluntarily packing up and moving either to Judah or to some other nearby nation to avoid the attack and forced exile by Assyria. OK. Let's get back to verse 16 of Obadiah.

Verse 16 opens with the Hebrew word *ki*, which translated to English is "for". It is used to connect this to verse 15. That is, *ki* means that verse 16 happens because of what verse 15 says. And verse 15 says that because of what Edom did to Israel, the same will happen to Edom. Now: who is the "you" who have drunk on My (God's) holy mountain? This is why I mentioned at the outset of today's lesson that verses 16 – 18 are God addressing Judah. Therefore, this is saying that it is Judah that has drunk on God's holy mountain. Recalling what we just learned about the terms drunk and drinking, then we understand that this is speaking about the negative effects of being drunken, meaning that in times past Israel drank from God's cup of wrath. Therefore, now the nations will drink from this same cup of wrath, thus having the same experience that Israel had had. If we to reword this verse just a bit to get across its meaning, it would say something like "Just as you people of Judah have drunk my cup of wrath, so in the End Times all the nations will drink from that same cup as well".

God's holy mountain always refers to Jerusalem and the Temple Mount. The name of the mountain is Mt. Moriah. That said, we should not think that in this use it is referring only to Jerusalem. It's just that Jerusalem was the capital of

Judah and thus representative of all Judah. Everywhere in Judah had suffered essentially the same.

Verse 16 goes on to say that the nations will drink continuously. In fact, the nations will gulp it down. Of course, this continuing metaphor of drinking and gulping is using wine drinking as its symbol. Although there are some deeper grammatical nuances, in the end what this is explaining is that the nations will drink from this cup continuously and zestfully. They won't slip, they'll slurp it down. Meaning, they think what they're doing is a good and pleasurable thing for them, but like a drunk who drinks more and more, faster and faster, enjoying every gulp, the nations have lost their grip on sober reality and that is what is leading them to destruction.

The first sentence of verse 16 ends with: "and they will be as if they had never been". What this is telling is that the destruction of the world's nations will be so complete that it will be like before they ever existed. We have an expression that speaks of "bombing an enemy back into the Stone Age", which brings across the same kind of idea. The nations will lose any significance and have no means to operate as a nation any longer. This same thought is expressed in other places in the Bible.

CJB Isaiah 17:14 ***14 As evening falls, you can see terror; before sunrise, they have ceased to be. This is the lot of those who plunder us, the fate of those who prey on us.***

CJB Jeremiah 46:28 ***28 Don't be afraid, Ya'akov my servant," says ADONAI, "for I am with you. I will finish off all the nations where I have scattered you. However, you I will not finish off, I will discipline you as you deserve, but not completely destroy you."***

My friends, we are the nations. There is no sign of there being exceptions. I realize this is anything but a happy, optimistic thought. But, better truth than false hope. We'll stop here for today.