

THE BOOK OF OBADIAH
Lesson 6, Chapter 1 Concluded END

The oracles we find in the biblical Prophets of warning and doom for the gentile nations because of their bad treatment of Israel, are at the same time messages of hope and comfort *for* Israel. Too much we tend to look at the government leaders of modern Israel, and many of the dubious political decisions they make, and think that this must be the criteria for how God will ultimately deal with Israel. Yet, we must understand that Israel is very different from all other nations that have ever existed in that it is the only nation that God created and set-apart for Himself. God assures us that Israel *will* survive and is not only at the center of His will, but also will be at the center of the government that He establishes after all that must happen has happened. Israel's good destiny will happen not because Israel is good, but because God is good. Historically, Israel has repeatedly failed at the task given it to be a kingdom of light, but God will not fail to bring about His intentions... and those intentions focus on Israel's golden destiny.

However... the destiny of the gentile nations is to suffer God's direct wrath, and thus their destruction is assured, to the point that it will be as though they never existed. In the Book of Obadiah, Edom as representative of both itself, and on a larger scale as representative of all gentile nations, is specifically called out for collaborating with Babylon in order to eliminate Judah. For Bible students one of the most important take-aways you can have from Obadiah is that direct connection between Edom and Babylon especially as concerns the End Times. Edom and Babylon are virtually synonymous in what they represent: unrighteousness, wickedness, anti-Israel, and therefore anti-God. These are the kingdoms of the anti-Christ. Therefore, their destiny is annihilation.

We were in verse 16 when we ended the previous lesson. To get our bearings for today's study, let's re-read the final 6 verses of Obadiah.

RE-READ OBADIAH CHAPTER 1:16 – 21

Verse 16 says that the nations will suffer all the calamities that Israel has suffered. But, verse 17 says Israel will experience the opposite. This optimism needs to be tempered, however, because it also essentially says that a holy

remnant will escape. In other words, it's not as though in the final battle that Israel will somehow escape unscathed. In fact, it appears that all that will remain of it will be a remnant.

It is interesting that Joel speaks of this same event, but with a different perspective.

CJB Joel 4:14-17 ***¹⁴ Such enormous crowds in the Valley of Decision! For the Day of ADONAI is upon us in the Valley of Decision! ¹⁵ The sun and moon have grown black, and the stars have stopped shining. ¹⁶ ADONAI will roar from Tziyon, he will thunder from Yerushalayim, the sky and the earth will shake. But ADONAI will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Isra'el. ¹⁷ "You will know that I am ADONAI your God, living on Tziyon my holy mountain." Then Yerushalayim will be holy, and foreigners will pass through her no more.***

Notice that this Joel passage tells of this same event as in Obadiah 17, and how the emphasis is on a newly restored holiness of Jerusalem. The question is: so, when did Jerusalem lose its holy status, and what is it that will return Jerusalem to its holy standing? Answer: what it always has been: Yehoveh's presence in His Holy Temple. So, clearly a Temple must be standing at that moment.

What Obadiah sees is God's remedy for past events of Jerusalem's desecration. Although I could cite several examples I'll just give you two so that you can see what I'm getting at.

CJB Jeremiah 51:51 ***"The reproaches we have heard have put us to shame, disgrace covers our faces; because foreigners have entered the sanctuaries of ADONAI's house."***

CJB Psalm 79:1 ***A psalm of Asaf: God, the pagans have entered your heritage. They have defiled your holy temple and turned Yerushalayim into rubble.***

Although the Temple was rebuilt after Judah's return from Babylon, the reality is that the Ark of the Covenant wasn't in the Holy of Holies. It had gone missing. Therefore, since the Ark of the Covenant is tied to God's presence then without the presence of the Ark no holiness was possible. So, the idea of designating

Jerusalem as holy during those 500 years after the Jews' return from Babylon until its destruction, this time at the hands of the Romans, is also not actually possible. When the High Priest would enter the Holy of Holies for but once per year (on Yom Kippur), after Babylon he entered into an empty room. So, when the High Priest sprinkled the blood of atonement it was not onto the Holy Ark as prescribed, it was onto the floor thus probably having no effect.

Because it is so important for us to grasp, I'll say this another way: Jerusalem has suffered from being NOT holy since the time Babylon destroyed the Temple right until today. So, what Joel and Obadiah prophesy is that in the End Times God will make His presence again in a new Temple, and as a result, finally after all this time, Jerusalem will again be holy. This nearly for sure means the reappearance of the Ark of the Covenant, and Rabbis have been looking for centuries to the whereabouts of the Ark. The enormity of such an event is staggering in its effect, and that is why the Prophets speak of it as they do.

Verse 18...still it is God speaking to Judah... connects 3 important names from Israel's past in Jacob, Joseph, and Esau. Jacob and Joseph of course are mentioned as representative of the covenant people, while Esau represents those who are outside the covenant. Also notice that Jacob and Joseph symbolize fire and flame, but Esau symbolizes the stubble that the fire and flame consume.

Because the names Jacob and Israel are synonymous, then the way the name Jacob is typically used in the Bible is to represent all the tribes of Israel. But, the mention of Joseph is only to the 2 sons he sired, and who gained tribal status, Ephraim and Manasseh. Ephraim and Manasseh went on to become the largest tribes along with Judah. But, more, those 2 tribes along with 8 others broke away from Israel-proper to become their own separate kingdom that the Bible calls the Northern Kingdom. This now divided house of Jacob also consisted of a Southern Kingdom called Judah. So, in this passage, Jacob is used to speak of the Kingdom of Judah, and Joseph the Kingdom of Ephraim/Israel. Clearly the 2 kingdoms have come back together as one in order to deal with Edom (the stubble). In fact, this plays exactly into a famous prophecy in which Ezekiel also speaks of these events of the End Times and Israel's role in it.

CJB Ezekiel 37: 15-22 ¹⁵ *The word of ADONAI came to me:* ¹⁶ *"You, human being, take one stick and write on it, 'For Y'hudah and those joined with him [among] the people of Isra'el.' Next, take another stick and write on it, 'For Yosef, the stick of Efrayim, and all the house of Isra'el who are joined with him.'* ¹⁷ *Finally, bring them together into a single stick, so that they become one in your hand.* ¹⁸ *When your people ask you what all this means,* ¹⁹ *tell them that Adonai ELOHIM says this: 'I will take the stick of Yosef, which is in the hand of Efrayim, together with the tribes of Isra'el who are joined with him, and put them together with the stick of Y'hudah and make them a single stick, so that they become one in my hand.'* ²⁰ *The sticks on which you write are to be in your hand as they watch.* ²¹ *Then say to them that Adonai ELOHIM says: 'I will take the people of Isra'el from among the nations where they have gone and gather them from every side and bring them back to their own land.* ²² *I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Isra'el; and one king will be king for all of them. They will no longer be two nations, and they will never again be divided into two kingdoms.*

All the Prophets that came and went over the many centuries, who prophesied about the End Times, Israel, and the fate of the nations, were remarkably consistent. And, because each one offered a little different perspective, or focused on a different aspect of End Times events, we can put together the information to paint a more robust picture. But always it focuses on the restoration of Israel, and on the return of holiness to Jerusalem.

When we put the pieces together we see that Israel will be decimated NOT by God, but through tribulation that the gentile nations thrust upon Israel. However, in repayment of doing this, God will intervene with His divine wrath and punish the nations. We also learn that Jordan will be heavily involved. In addition, none of this happens until representatives of the Northern Kingdom and representatives of the Southern Kingdom have returned to Israel and united under one banner and one government. They have done this, so we can check this event off the End Times list. We learn that all the nations of the world turn against Israel; this is happening before our eyes as a consequence of the Israeli-Gaza War. We also learn that Israel will again control and live on the mountains of Israel. This means Judea and Samaria, which today is known as the West Bank that is home to the Palestinians. Israel does not have full control or sovereignty over that area, so we should be watching for that to happen in the

near future. And, finally, Jordan (Edom) has to become weak and feckless; it is well down that road as a declining nation with poor leadership, little natural resources, a poor economy, and as such the Arab world as well as the West is generally ambivalent about them as not amounting to much.

Back to the mention of Jacob as fire and Joseph as flame. Biblically, fire is symbolic of two things: purification or destruction. In Bible-think purification and destruction are opposites. Purification is the pathway to holiness. Destruction is the fate of wickedness. Poetically, Esau as the stubble (and as representative of all gentile nations) is, then, worthy only of destruction, and Israel (as fire and flame) will be God's instrument in bringing this about.

The extent of the destruction to Esau and the nations is emphasized with the words to end verse 18 that say that none will remain, as if to imply that not one person will remain alive. Yet, linguistically speaking that isn't really the case. The term "none" doesn't really appear in the verse...more literally it is that there will be so survivors. Yet, biblically speaking such a notion does not equate to the English equivalent of none meaning zero. It works the same for the Hebrew notion of the word all (*kol* in Hebrew). All or none mean mostly all and mostly none. If we were to take this statement literally it would mean that after God's wrath not one single person living anywhere but in Israel would survive, and clearly that is not the case since other prophecies speak of nations existing after the End Times apocalypse.

Verse 18 ends with the words "for Yehoveh has spoken it". The point of God saying this is so that Israel and all God worshippers can be certain that it is Yehoveh who says this. That is, this prophecy comes from the God named Yehoveh. Just as important, since it comes from God it is 100% certain that it will happen just as it is spoken. Yet, one of the points of debate about prophecies such as Obadiah's is that it speaks only of things that happened long ago in the past, and people are wrongly inferring that it is speaking of the future. Listen to Jeremiah.

CJB Jeremiah 49: 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."*

Jeremiah was an adult living in Judah when Babylon invaded and exiled the people. Yet, instead of speaking in the incomplete tense about Edom and the nations (incomplete is similar to the past tense), Jeremiah recorded God as saying that when Edom and the nations are punished, it will be a later time (not as something that's already happened). So, this is just one of several proofs that these are End Times events even though they happened to a lesser extent in the ancient past.

In a word, "restoration" is the theme of verses 19 through 21. A good way to think of these verses is as Obadiah's further explanation of what the previous few verses meant. That is, these are Obadiah's words. Inspired, certainly, but not the same level of perfection as recording what Yehoveh showed him in a vision.

There are 4 sets of word associations here that once we see this makes the structure easier to understand. First, Negeb is connected with Mt. Esau. Second, Shephelah is connected with Philistines. Third, the territory of Ephraim is connected to the territory of Samaria. And finally, Benjamin is connected with Gilead. At the time that Obadiah wrote this, it seems that Edom occupied a good portion of the southern desert region of Judah called the Negeb, and the Philistines occupied most of the Mediterranean Coastal plain of Judah called the Shephelah. The connection between Samaria and the Ephraimites was plain because Samaria was the capital city in the territory the Ephraimites held. The connection between Benjamin and Gilead, however, is cloudy. Since the Negeb was controlled by Edom, the prophecy is that this situation will reverse. The same for the Shephelah...the Philistines will eventually be booted out.

The territory of Ephraim essentially refers to most of the Northern Kingdom that was conquered by Assyria around 723 B.C., and today it is what is called the West Bank controlled by the Palestinians. The prophecy is that control of this territory will return to Israel. Gilead is on the east side of the Jordan River, an area that very early in Israel's occupation of Canaan were the territories of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh. Benjamin was originally part of the Northern Kingdom and represented the southernmost of their borders. Later it was annexed by Judah. At any rate, the prediction is that the inhabitants of that area will move east and take over the territory on the east side of the Jordan that at

one time belonged to Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh. Today, that territory belongs to Jordan (Edom). Thus, all these changes represent Israel's restoration in all of its parts, largely back to the way it was after Joshua first led Israel into the Promised Land and conquered the various peoples living there. It is understood that while geographical names are used, in fact it more means the people of those regions.

As we move on to verse 20, the first words are "the exiles". Most Bible scholars will tell us that this verse is very difficult to translate, and very likely because there are some errors in its transmission that are not uncommon among the oldest handwritten texts because there are certain Hebrew letters that are notoriously similar looking to others, and they often get confused. There seems to be two groups of exiles that are being spoken about, and it is these two groups of exiles that will take possession of the Negeb away from Edom.

Due to the beginning syntax of the verse, it means that the happenings depicted in verse 20 are more or less simultaneous with those of verse 19. The exiles that are being spoken of (and I'm still assuming it is two groups of exiles) must be speaking of the exiles sent away from the Northern Kingdom of Ephraim/Israel by the Assyrians, and later the exiles sent away from the Southern Kingdom of Judah by the Babylonians. This for certain is not speaking of any military, but rather simply as civilians... those people taken captive from both Judah and Ephraim/Israel.

The Book of Ezekiel speaks of this in its own way and it is enlightening when we connect it to Obadiah.

CJB Ezekiel 37: 1-14 *With the hand of ADONAI upon me, ADONAI carried me out by his Spirit and set me down in the middle of the valley, and it was full of bones. ² He had me pass by all around them- there were so many bones lying in the valley, and they were so dry! ³ He asked me, "Human being, can these bones live?" I answered, "Adonai ELOHIM! Only you know that!" ⁴ Then he said to me, "Prophecy over these bones! Say to them, 'Dry bones! Hear what ADONAI has to say! ⁵ To these bones Adonai ELOHIM says, "I will make breath enter you, and you will live. ⁶ I will attach ligaments to you, make flesh grow on you, cover you with skin and put breath in you. You will live, and you will know that I am*

ADONAI. "" 7 So I prophesied as ordered; and while I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound; it was the bones coming together, each bone in its proper place. 8 As I watched, ligaments grew on them, flesh appeared and skin covered them; but there was no breath in them. 9 Next he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath! Prophecy, human being! Say to the breath that Adonai ELOHIM says, 'Come from the four winds, breath; and breathe on these slain, so that they can live.' "" 10 So I prophesied as ordered, and the breath came into them, and they were alive! They stood up on their feet, a huge army! 11 Then he said to me, "Human being! These bones are the whole house of Isra'el; and they are saying, 'Our bones have dried up, our hope is gone, and we are completely cut off.' " 12 Therefore prophesy; say to them that Adonai ELOHIM says, 'My people! I will open your graves and make you get up out of your graves, and I will bring you into the land of Isra'el. 13 Then you will know that I am ADONAI- when I have opened your graves and made you get up out of your graves, my people! 14 I will put my Spirit in you; and you will be alive. Then I will place you in your own land; and you will know that I, ADONAI, have spoken, and that I have done it,' says ADONAI."

Ezekiel's prophecy speaks of the awakening of all these Israelites scattered to the 4 winds for so long that they had lost any hope that they could possibly be reassembled as a people and returned to their former land. Of course, for this to happen, the land of Israel first had to be re-established. In one of most amazing, miraculous fulfillments of prophecy, in 1948 it happened! Now a few decades later, those rattling bones of Ezekiel have indeed come alive and the descendants of all 12 tribes of Israel are coming back to their homeland...drawn there by some mysterious invisible hand... to reclaim their inheritance. I'm sad and disheartened that so few Believers have even noticed this is happening. The same Believers that seem to want to know so much about End Times matters are oblivious to what is happening with Israel. And if they have noticed, too much it is acknowledged with a "ho-hum", and "this has nothing to do with me" mindset, with many cheering on and supporting Israel's arch enemies. And yet, the End Times completely revolves around Israel and God vindicating them. And, Church, I'll remind you that you did NOT replace national or ethnic Israel! You did not take over Israel's blessings from God as this blasphemous doctrine that you have has become foundational for the Constantinian Church.

The phrase “the land of the Canaanites up to Zarephath” is referring to the inhabitants of the coast north of Mount Carmel. Those inhabitants were the Phoenicians. Why use the term Canaanites, when the Canaanites had centuries earlier than Obadiah been rooted out and taken over by Israel? Because by invoking that term, the idea is to recall all the land that was originally promised to Moses for the Israelite people he led out of Egypt.

Zarephath, then, was a Phoenician city. Zarephath represented the farthest northern extent of the territory God had given to Israel. It’s kind of important to know where that place is today in modern terms since it will help us to understand the sorts of things that must happen, and where they must happen, in order for this prophecy to be fulfilled.

This place is today located in what is the coast of Lebanon, next to the village of Sarafand. It is interesting that at least some of what is modern day Lebanon is actually mentioned in the Bible as being part of Israel’s land inheritance. Here is but one of a few passages that speak of this.

CJB Deuteronomy 1:6-8 ***6 "ADONAI spoke to us in Horev. He said, 'You have lived long enough by this mountain. 7 Turn, get moving and go to the hill-country of the Emori and all the places near there in the 'Aravah, the hill-country, the Sh'felah, the Negev and by the seashore- the land of the Kena'ani, and the L'vanon, as far as the great river, the Euphrates River. 8 I have set the land before you! Go in, and take possession of the land ADONAI swore to give to your ancestors Avraham, Yitz'chak and Ya'akov, and their descendants after them.'***

The next phrase in Obadiah 20 that speaks of where the exiles will come from mentions the exiles of Jerusalem who are in Sepharad. The use of the word Jerusalem doesn’t mean only the city. It was just a common way of expressing all of Judah (since Jerusalem was Judah’s capital). That’s the easy part. The hard part is in determining the whereabouts of Sepharad. Part of the problem comes from some obvious copyist errors. For instance, in the Greek Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible dating to the 3rd century B.C., which is the text source of the Old Testament in most modern Bibles), instead of this verse reading “Sepharad” it reads Ephratha (a clear misspelling) because if taken literally it means an area near to Bethlehem, which makes no sense. Likewise,

the Latin Vulgate Bible has "Bosphorus" (that is, the strait between Asia Minor and Thrace), which equally makes no sense and is almost certainly mostly just a misspelling.

The 2 most popular views are that either Sepharad is referring to Spain (which is what the Aramaic Targum and Peshitta interpret it as), or to Sardis that is located in western Asia Minor. I don't think it is possible to be certain exactly where this is referring to. Yet, the essence of it is that it is far away and so even those descendants of Judah (Jews) that live in the most remote places will...somehow... be included in the restoration process.

The final phrase speaks of Israel repossessing the cities of the Negeb. The Negeb is the vast desert region in southern Israel. It would seem like an unlikely place for any people group such as Edom to set up towns and cities, so for Israel to again possess them seemed very dubious. However, pretty recent archaeological digs have uncovered a growing, if not thriving, ancient Edomite presence in the Negeb. So, apparently this is what this verse is talking about.

Verse 21 brings Obadiah to a close. We find that Israel will have "Deliverers" (plural) that lead them up to Mount Zion to judge Mt. Esau. Deliverers cannot be referring to Yeshua because clearly it is speaking of more than one. And to go up to Mount Zion (meaning the Temple Mount in Jerusalem) to "judge" means it more in the sense of ruling over Esau (Edom) than in some kind of judicial trial.

We find the term Deliverers used in other places in the Old Testament, which can be a helpful tool to understand what it is talking about. Nehemiah can be instructional.

CJB Nehemiah 9:27 *So you handed them over to the power of their adversaries, who oppressed them. Yet in the time of their trouble, when they cried out to you, you heard from heaven, and in keeping with your great compassion, you gave them saviors (deliverers) to save them from the power of their adversaries.*

So, it is that we are to understand the term deliverers in the context of having great heroes that arise among Israel to save them from their oppressors that we need to understand the words of Obadiah 21.

The verse, and in a way what it is that God has to say about Judah in Obadiah, can be summed up by saying that 3 main points are made. To use Douglas Stuart's words, those 3 points are these:

- 1) Jerusalem will again be the center of refuge and prosperity for the exiles of Israel.
- 2) Jerusalem as the capital of Judah will control a subdued Edom (Jordan) in the restoration era.
- 3) Yehoveh will be acknowledged supreme.

As Stuart wisely points out, the reason this 3rd point is so important is that the Israelites... whether of the Northern Kingdom or the Southern... continued to understand Yehoveh as but one among a large pantheon of gods. Obadiah's prophecy essentially says that some day that error that was so embedded in the minds of Israelites...and made Israel too much like the pagan world who believed the same... will be resolved and they will come to see Yehoveh as the only god in existence, and so will worship and appeal only to Him.

One more thing I'd like to point out and then we'll close this study of Obadiah. Notice how we have the words "Deliverers will go up into Mount Zion to judge Mount Esau". What this verse does is to summarize that in the end, the final battle on earth will be about Mount Zion against Mount Esau. Jacob against his twin brother. Israel against Jordan (and the whole world, for that matter). The covenant people against the non-covenant people. And, that as impossible as it might to seem to us, today...even to Israel... Israel will be victorious over the entire world.

This concludes our study of the Book of Obadiah.