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Obadiah



Bible Book Overviews - Steve Gregg

In his message, Steve Gregg discusses the prophetic book of Obadiah, the shortest book in the Old Testament that prophesies against the pagan people of Edom. Although related to Israel, the Edomites were hostile towards them and even looted Jerusalem, leading to God's judgment falling upon them. Obadiah predicts the downfall and eventual extinction of Edom, while referencing wise men and the restoration of Israel and the establishment of God's kingdom.

Transcript

We'll take a brief look at this book Obadiah. It's the shortest book in the Old Testament. And it's like Jonah and Nahum, it is a prophecy against a pagan people instead of Israel.

And that pagan people in this case is not Assyria, as was the case with Jonah and Nahum, but Edom. Now, the Edomites were closely related to Israel, you know, in terms of their family, because Edom came from Esau, and his name was Edom also. I mean, the word Edom means red and the name Esau means hairy.

And we're told in Genesis that when the twins, Jacob and Esau, were born, that Esau came out all covered with red hair, so they called him hairy, Esau. And then later on, they called him red, probably partly due to the red hair, but also because he sold his birthright for some red lentils. That's actually the reason that's given for calling him Edom, though, whatever.

Since he was covered with red hair, he might have also been called red, nicknamed, I mean, sometimes people with red hair are nicknamed red. So, you know, this one guy, Esau, and he was the twin brother of Jacob. Now, Jacob became Israel, and Jacob's twelve sons became the twelve tribes of Israel.

So, the nation of Israel came from one branch of that family, and the nation of Edom came from the other twin brother. So, both Edom and Jacob came from Abraham and Isaac. And the sons of Isaac, and so they had close, you know, genetic family connection, but they weren't ever close in terms of sympathy with each other.

And what happened was that Edomites were always hostile to Jacob. There never really was a time when they were friendly nations with each other. At one point, Israel actually subjugated Edom, which was a neighbor, Edom was neighboring them to the southeast, and at one time they were subjugated by Israel, actually more than once.

And so they were just another hostile power in the area. They might as well have been, well, I guess they were considered Gentiles, even though they were, had blood relations with Israel. When Israel, or I should say when Judah, was taken into captivity by the Babylonians in 586 BC, the Edomites, who one would hope would show some sympathy toward their brother nation, Israel, actually had no sympathy for their brother nation, Israel.

They actually gloated and were happy that Judah had been destroyed by the Babylonians, and even took part in the looting of the city of Jerusalem. When Jerusalem fell, the Edomites among the Babylonians came in and looted along with them. So, Edom is viewed by Obadiah as being very unbrotherly, to say the least, and frankly, immoral for doing this to Judah.

The judgment upon Edom is what Obadiah is talking about. Now, Edom actually, although they helped the Babylonians to loot the city in 586 BC, four years later, the Babylonians returned and destroyed the Edomites and took them into captivity. And so this is no doubt written between those two, between 586 when the Edomites looted Jerusalem, and 582 when Edom itself was judged by the Babylonians coming in.

And so Obadiah refers back to what the Edomites had done in being very unbrotherly toward Judah, but also predicts their own, the Edomites' destruction. Now, interestingly, the Edomites, when they were taken into captivity, they never were restored as a nation again. There were some remnant of them living in the southern region of Judah, where they had apparently fled during the time that Edom was invaded by the Babylonians, and there were some Edomites there.

But in the year 126 BC, a Judean leader named John Hyrcanus, this is during what we call the intertestamental period, this is after the closing of the Old Testament, before the opening of the New Testament, there's 400 years there. In the latter part of that 400 years, this Jewish leader named John Hyrcanus conquered the Edomites and incorporated them into Judah. So the Edomites kind of became part of the nation of the Jews, but ethnically diverse from them.

But they were subjugated by Judah. And then the last known Edomite family, because they did kind of get absorbed and so forth, was the Herod family. Herod the Great, who was ruling in Israel at the time Jesus was born, had been appointed by the Romans to be the king of Israel, or king of Judah, king of the Jews.

And the Jews hated it. And the Jews hated the fact that an Edomite was ruling over them.

So anyway, the Herod family, Herod the Great died and several of his sons were called Herod, Antipas, Herod, Agrippa, and so forth, Herod Archelaus.

These Herods were the last family of Edomites known to exist. So when their family died off, the Edomites became extinct. There are no Edomites today.

And so Obadiah does speak of this, does speak of them becoming an extinct people. Now I would point out something interesting in a later prophet, in Malachi, because it's a well-known and quoted statement about Edom. In Malachi chapter 1, I suppose the reason it's a memorable passage is because Paul quotes it in Romans 9. He's talking about Israel and Edom.

It says in Malachi chapter 1, verse 2, God says, I have loved you, speaking to Israel, says the Lord, yet you say, in what way have you loved us? He says, was not Esau Jacob's brother, says the Lord. Yet Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated, and laid waste his mountains and his heritage for the jackals of the wilderness. Now this statement, Jacob I have loved and Esau I have hated, Paul quotes it in Romans 9. People sometimes think that what this is saying is that God hated the man Esau and loved the man Jacob.

Well, in a sense, it could be said he did, but if we think in terms of the way their later nations were treated, Esau actually had a pretty good life, and as far as we know, a pretty peaceful death, the man himself. But his children, his family, occupied what was called Mount Seir. Just as Israel eventually conquered Canaan, and the land of Canaan became the land of Israel, so Mount Seir had been the land of the Horites, just a pagan group of people, and the people of Esau conquered the Horites and drove them out, just like Israel did the Canaanites.

So the land of the Canaanites became the land of Israel, and the land of the Horites, which is Mount Seir, became Edom. And Edom's capital was the city called Selah or Petra, which is a rock city, and they were very easily defensible against invaders. They felt pretty secure because their rock city of Petra had sheer stone cliffs through a narrow passageway, which was easy to defend against invaders, sort of like the defenders of Troy, you know, fighting off the attackers in the narrow passageway there.

But their dwelling places were carved out of the faces of these cliffs up high, where it would be very hard for someone to get to them. So the fact that they made their dwelling places high on these rock cliffs made them feel like, and they had this easily defensible narrow gorge that enemies had to come through, made them feel very secure. I mean, it made them feel confident, in fact, that other nations might be conquered by the Babylonians, but they would not be.

And yet they were. And so that's something that Obadiah talks about. Now when Malachi says, Jacob I have loved, Esau I have hated, he's not talking about the man Jacob or the man Esau, he's talking about the nation of Jacob, Israel, and the nation of Esau, Edom.

That both nations have been taken into captivity when Malachi was writing, they'd both been taken in, but Israel had been restored by God, had gone back and restored their nation. The Edomites had not. And therefore, that's what it means, Jacob I have loved, Esau I have hated.

He says, speaking about Edom, he says I wasted his mountains and made them desolate and so forth. So he did that to Israel too, but he let Israel be restored later on, after the Babylonians fell. Edom's mountains were still desolate at the time of Malachi.

So they're saying this is a mark of God's disfavor on the nation of Edom and his favor on the nation of Jacob. Just looking at the book itself, it says, the vision of Obadiah, thus says the Lord God concerning Edom, we have heard a report from the Lord and a messenger has been sent among the nations saying arise and let us rise up against her for battle. Now this nation rising up against Edom is Babylon in this case.

Judah had already been taken into captivity before this point, but Edom had not yet fallen and didn't know they were going to. They thought they were pretty secure. He says, behold, I will make you small among the nations.

You should be greatly despised. 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? Though you exalt yourself as high as the Eagle and though you set your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down, says the Lord. Now these high habitations in the rock crevice and so forth would be, could possibly be as high as the Eagle's nest, but even if it wasn't, this is hyperbole. This is an exaggeration.

Though you set your nest among the stars, that's obviously impossible. This kind of language is used in a couple of other places significantly, actually more interestingly than here. Because in Isaiah chapter 14, we have a prophecy against the King of Babylon.

And the King of Babylon is symbolically called Lucifer. Now Lucifer, of course, we think of as a name for Satan, but the Bible never refers to Satan as Lucifer. The word Lucifer only appears once in the Bible.

And it's in this passage where it should speak about the King of Babylon. Some people think, well, it's not just addressing the King of Babylon, it's addressing the devil who's kind of the power behind the King of Babylon. So Lucifer, a term used by Isaiah to speak of the King of Babylon, is thought to be also applicable to the devil.

It's sort of by extrapolation, though the Bible nowhere confirms that the word Lucifer refers to the devil. If you look at Isaiah chapter 14, you'll see in verse 4, God says to Isaiah that you will take up this proverb against the King of Babylon and say, and he

gives this prophecy against the King of Babylon, which includes this statement in verse 12, Isaiah 14, 12, how are you fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning. Now the word Lucifer is actually an expression that means day star.

It is actually from the Latin. The Hebrew Bible, I think it was written in Hebrew. It was then translated into Greek in the Septuagint, and then later, I believe in the 4th century, if I'm not mistaken, AD, the Vulgate, which is the Latin Bible, was translated by Jerome.

And so the Bible came into the Western Church, the Latin Church, the Roman Church, which we know as the Roman Catholic Church, through the Vulgate, the Latin translation of the Bible. Now in Latin, the Hebrew word that Isaiah used is Lucifer. That's the Latin word.

And the Hebrew word means day star or morning star. And so for some reason, we don't know why, the King James Version, when it was translated into Hebrew into English, they came to this word day star, and instead of translating it from the Hebrew into English, they simply kept the Latin word that Jerome had used in the Latin Bible, Lucifer, and treated it as a proper name, which it probably was not intended as a proper name. There was no king of Babylon named Lucifer, and yet day star is a term that's even used of Jesus later on.

It's like a royal title. Jesus is not the king of Babylon, and he's not Lucifer. But to refer to a king as the day star is simply a flattering nickname to give to a king.

So the king of Babylon is referred to in the Hebrew as the day star. The name Lucifer came into the passage in English from the Latin and probably should not. In fact, if you have the King James or the New King James, it'll say Lucifer.

If you have any other modern translation, it won't. If you have the New American Standard, the English Standard, any modern translation will not say Lucifer here. It'll instead translate it as day star, which is what it means.

So anyway, this is to the king of Babylon, and it says in Isaiah chapter 14, in verse 13, it says, You have said in your heart, I will ascend into heaven. I will exalt my throne above the stars of God. I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest side of the north.

I will ascend above the heights of the clouds. I will be like the most high, yet you should be brought down to shale to the lowest depths of the pit. Now, this statement that the king of Babylon said, I will exalt my throne above the stars.

I will ascend above the clouds. Many people say, well, no earthly king would think that way. That must be a reference to the devil, you know.

But in fact, earthly nations do think that way sometimes. Edom did, apparently. I mean,

it was a hyperbole.

It's an exaggeration. But Obadiah says, even though you exalt yourself as high as the eagle, though you set your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down, says the Lord. And even Jesus used that imagery, speaking about a city of his time.

Actually, the city of Capernaum. There we go. Matthew 11, in verse 23, Jesus said, and you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades, or shale.

Now, this is the same thing that God said to Lucifer, the king of Babylon, in Isaiah 14, 12. Though you exalt yourself to heaven, yet you'll be brought down to shale. Jesus says the very same thing to Capernaum.

Though you are exalted to heaven, you'll be brought down to Hades, which is shale in the Greek. So, it's clear that this is a figure of speech. And yet, more than Babylon, and more than Capernaum, the Edomites actually did have their nests high in the rock, so to speak.

I mean, they really were exalted up there, probably almost as high as the eagle, if not as high as the eagle. But certainly when he says, though you set your nest among the stars, I'll bring you down, that's the same kind of hyperbole you find, speaking of Babylon and Capernaum, in these other passages. Verse 5 says, If thieves had come to you, if robbers by night, oh, how will you be cut off? Would they not have stolen until they had enough? If great gatherers had come to you, would they not have left some gleanings? Now, this verse is actually taken from Jeremiah 49.9. Jeremiah 49.9. Now, Jeremiah said the same thing about Edom.

If great gatherers had come, oh, they'd take enough to satisfy themselves, but they'd leave some gleanings. They didn't have, you know, the efficient means of harvesting and so forth that we have today. And when they'd go gather the grapes from vines, they'd grab the clusters and put them in their baskets and move along as fast as they could.

But there'd be a grape here, or a little tiny cluster there that they'd miss. And the law of Moses said that the Jews, when they do gather their grapes, and even when they harvest their wheat fields, whatever falls to the ground, a head of wheat or something, or one that's left on the stock by accident, don't go back for it. Those are called the gleanings.

That was for the poor to come. And, you know, after the harvest had taken place and the general bringing in of the products of the field and the vineyard, the poor could go through and pick up the gleanings and take them home and eat those. That was part of the law.

Leave the gleanings for the poor. Well, that's what lies behind this statement. If they had gathered grapes, they would leave at least some gleanings.

The idea is, but, the Babylonians, when they come to you, they're not going to leave anything behind. It's not like they're going to take most of you and leave some remnant of you behind. They're going to take every last one.

They're more greedy than most harvesters are. Most harvesters would leave something behind, but the Babylonians will not leave any, is what he's implying here. Verse 6, Oh, how Esau shall be searched out.

I mean, Esau here is Edom. How his hidden treasures shall be sought after. 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.

Apparently, Edom and Babylon considered themselves allies when Judah fell to the Babylonians. And the Edomites, like I say, among the Babylonians, went in there and plundered the place. So those who were at peace with you, meaning the Babylonians, are going to turn on you now.

And this is what happened when the Babylonians came and took them away. Will I not in that day, says the Lord, even destroy the wise men from Edom and the understanding from the mountains of Esau? Then your mighty men, O Teman, Teman was one of Esau's sons, and therefore there's a branch of the Edomites called the Temanites, shall be dismayed to the end that everyone from the mountains of Esau may be cut off by slaughter. Now, one interesting thing here about the wise men of Edom and of Teman, the Temanites, in one of the earliest books in the Bible, possibly the earliest, the book of Job, Job probably lived in the region that was Edom.

We don't know where he lived exactly, but he was not a Jew and he was said to be the greatest of the men of the east. And from Israel's point of view, the next nation east would be the Edomites. And one of his friends is said to have been a Temanite.

One of the counselors to Job that came, and eventually wasn't a very good counselor, but he was Eliphaz the Temanite. And Teman was one of the sons of Esau. So the Edomites, Job was very possibly an Edomite leader, some think he was an Edomite king or prince.

But one of his friends was a Temanite, which was also from Edom. But they were considered wise men. I mean, Job and his friends were not just your ordinary neighbors, they were philosophers.

I mean, in ancient nations, philosophers and counselors were very much esteemed for their wisdom. And a counselor who was very wise would be esteemed almost as much as a prophet, as one to get advice from. It's almost like hearing from God when you hear from their wisdom.

One of David's counselors was named Ahithophel. He was just a wise man, he was not an inspired prophet. But Ahithophel, we're told, had a reputation that to inquire of Ahithophel, that is to seek advice from Ahithophel, was like inquiring of the Oracle of God, which means, it's like talking to a prophet of God.

Ahithophel was so wise that you'd as soon talk to him as to God himself to get wisdom, to get advice. Now, it was no doubt a hyperbole, but that's just the way that wise men were esteemed, if they were very wise. Solomon, of course, when he was offered anything he wanted by God, said, but give me wisdom.

And later in 1 Kings chapter 4, it says, the wisdom of Solomon exceeded that of, and it mentions several lesser known or unknown wise men of the time, who had a reputation for being great wise men. And the writer of 1 Kings says in Solomon's words, it was even better than theirs. So, it's interesting that there was this class or this profession of people who were like philosophers, logicians, counselors, that were wise men.

And Job, it's very clear from what his friends say when they come, that they were philosophers, they were wise men of the east. They were Edomite wise men, probably. And it says, even I will destroy the wise men of Edom and the mighty men of Teman.

Now, this was, of course, Obadiah wrote this a long time after Job, so he's not, you know, pronouncing curses or denunciations on Job's counselors personally. But probably the class of people that Job's counselors belonged to, you know, were the wise men of Esau or Edom. But they're all going to be cut off.

The cutting off the wise men is also mentioned in Jeremiah and in some of the other Old Testament prophets with relation to the fall of Judah. That God said he's going to take away the law from the priests and counsel from the wise. And he's going to take, you know, he's going to take away the prophet.

This is saying that a country when it comes under God's judgment, he takes away all the access they had to wisdom, which is a very valued thing in the Middle East, if you're wise. It's almost like being a mighty man in war, a mighty man of valor, you have sort of a status. And so it mentions in some of the judgment oracles of the other prophets, and here God taking away the wise men from them.

Which, without wise men, you couldn't really strategize. The kings needed to talk to wise men about strategy. And with the wise men gone, the nation would have no strategy for self-defense.

Verse 10, for your violence against your brother Jacob, meaning Israel, shame shall cover you and you shall be cut off forever, which they have been. They're not around anymore. In the day that you stood on the other side, in the day that strangers carried away his forces, when foreigners entered his gates, meaning Israel's gates, and cast lots for

Jerusalem, even you were as one of them.

So he says, this is your problem, that you took sides, you were on the wrong side. You know, it was Babylon against Judah, and you took the side of Babylon. When they were casting lots for Jerusalem, casting lots was often the way that people would divide up real estate.

In fact, when the Jews first came, or when Israel first came into Canaan, Joshua used the casting of lots to determine which portions would be given to which tribes and so forth. So he's talking about Jerusalem now as being taken by the pagans, by the Babylonians, and they were casting lots over who would get this house, who would get this section of the city. He says, you were like one of them, that is, you were like a plunderer, taking things from your brother, Nation Jacob.

Verse 12, But you should not have gazed on the day of your brother, that is, the day he was suffering, in the day of his captivity, nor should you have rejoiced over the children of Judah in the day of their destruction, nor should you have spoken proudly in the day of distress. You should not have entered the gate of my people in the day of their calamity. Indeed, you should not have gazed on the affliction in the day of their calamity, nor laid hands on their substance in the day of their calamity.

There's a lot of repetition of this in the day of their calamity. You shouldn't have done this in the day of their calamity or done that in the day of their calamity. When they were in fact, you know, helpless, you could have helped them, but instead you took advantage of their helplessness in the day of their calamity.

You should not have stood at the crossroads to cut off those among them who escaped, nor should you have delivered up those among them who remained. So apparently as people were fleeing from Jerusalem from the Babylonian invaders, there were certain routes they'd take, which were the traveling routes, the crossroads they'd come to. The Edomites were standing there, not letting them escape and apparently turning them over to their captors.

So they were not just, you know, helping. They were helping the wrong side. And this is what made God angry at Edom.

It says, For the day of the Lord is upon the nations, or the day of the Lord upon all nations is near. Now the day of the Lord is on all nations. This doesn't mean that all the nations are going to be suffering at the same time.

In the Old Testament, the term day of the Lord refers to the time that God judges a nation. Every nation eventually falls and it is seen as God's doing when a nation falls. God brings them down.

They've had their day. Their day now is the day of their destruction. And we see, For the

day of the Lord upon all nations is near.

He doesn't mean all nations at the same time. Each nation has its own day of the Lord where God judges them. This time it's going to be Edom's turn.

As you have done, it shall be done to you. Your reprisal shall return upon your own head. For as you drank on my holy mountain, meaning apparently they celebrated on the depopulated Mount Zion after the Jews had been carried away captive.

So shall the nations drink continually. Yes, they shall drink and swallow, and they shall be as though they had never been. That is the Edomites even today are as though they had never been.

But on Mount Zion, which is of course Jerusalem, there shall be deliverance. And this is true. I mean, both Jews and Edomites were carried away to Babylon.

But God had promised through Isaiah and other prophets that that captivity would eventually end and God would restore Jerusalem and they'd rebuild the temple and they'd return. And that's what's referring to, yeah, God's going to bring deliverance to Mount Zion and it's going to be rebuilt. And it was in 539 BC when Babylon fell to the Egyptians.

And there shall be holiness. The house of Jacob shall possess their possessions. 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. This reference to the house of Jacob and of Joseph, meaning the Israelites, shall be a flame and the house of Esau will be what they burn up, will be their fuel, is no doubt referring to, as I said, in 126 BC when John Hyrcanus, the Jewish leader, conquered Edom.

And it was only about a century or so after that that they pretty much ceased to exist. So Jerusalem will have its vengeance against Esau, the Edomites. The inhabitants of the south shall possess the mountains of Esau and the inhabitants of the Philistine lowland.

They shall possess the fields of Ephraim and the fields of Samaria and Benjamin shall possess Gilead. Notice the Jews will come back from Babylon and they'll possess these lands again, the lands that had been once in control of Philistines and once been in control of Esau, these different lands that had been conquered permanently, their lands will now fall to the hands of the Jews when they're restored from Babylon and that would become part of Jews' territory. It says, and the captives of this host of the children of Israel shall possess the land of the Canaanites as far as Zarephath.

Now Zarephath up in the north, of course, is where Elijah had fled from Jezebel and he'd stayed with the widow there at Zarephath. The captives of Jerusalem who are in

Sepharad shall possess the cities of the south. Then saviors shall come to Mount Zion to judge the mountains of Esau and the kingdom shall be the Lord's.

Now these saviors, or deliverers it can be translated, these saviors are going to come to Mount Zion and no doubt this refers to the return of the exiles from Babylon to rebuild Jerusalem and they will have their vengeance, as it were, upon the people of Esau, the Edomites. And the kingdom shall be the Lord's just means that there's a succession of kingdoms. The Assyrians fell to the Babylonians, the Babylonians fell to the Medes and the Persians, but ultimately God is going to restore his kingdom, which was associated with the Jews and that was seen when they were brought back from Babylon and the Jewish nation was restored.

But the kingdom, when the Jews came back they never were a kingdom really again. They were, when they came back from Babylon they were vassals under the Medes and the Persians. And then when the Greeks conquered the Persians they were vassals under the Greeks and then when the Romans conquered the Greeks they were vassals under the Romans and under the Romans they were destroyed and have not existed as a nation with a king anymore.

And the reason for that is when Jesus came preaching he said the kingdom of God is at hand. And the last line in Edom, excuse me, in Obadiah is the kingdom shall be the Lord's. So there was an anticipation the Jews had from passages like this and many others that God was going to restore his kingdom to Israel.

But it didn't happen when they came back from Babylon. It didn't happen under the Medes and Persians or under the Greeks or under the Romans. It happened when the Messiah came and was proclaimed king.

He, at his ascension, it says in Psalm 110, God said to Jesus, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool. And the Bible says that Christ is reigning at the right hand of God over his people which is his kingdom. So the kingdom is no longer associated with the earthly nation of Israel.

It's associated with whoever is subject to the king, Jesus. And so frankly we refer to that as the church, the redeemed, the people of God, the body of Christ, they are the kingdom of the Lord. So like all the prophets, although Obadiah is mainly focused on things in his region and near his time, virtually all the prophets including the shortest prophet in the Old Testament have at least something to say about the messianic kingdom.

The kingdom did not become the Lord's after the Jews went into captivity until Jesus came and established his kingdom. So this has to be a reference to the messianic kingdom of Christ. And it shows that Christ's coming and his kingdom coming was such the core of God's purpose for history that no prophet could avoid mentioning it even if

they are talking about something entirely different.

I mean the fall of Edom is about as far removed from the story of Jesus and the kingdom of God that could be imagined and yet the whole book is about the judgment on Edom and then, and by the way that happened hundreds of years before Jesus came, but the book can't really properly close until it mentions, but God's going to establish his kingdom again, he'll be reigning over his people again. And as I say that never really happened until Jesus came and it's true now because we are his kingdom for his son. So enough of Obadiah.