



obadiah

ADDRESSING PRIDE, PREJUDICE AND PROSPERITY

The book of Obadiah, the smallest book in the Old Testament, opens with the words, “The vision of Obadiah”—stating it is a prophetic writing of judgment yet to come to the Edomites. Although this “postcard prophecy” is severe, short, and very much to the point, it concludes with a wonderful picture of God’s compassion and grace. Obadiah helps to establish for us a platform of conversation to address and ultimately confront pride, prejudice and prosperity. And today, its message reveals that God is providentially stripping us from cultural Christianity and calling us to biblical discipleship.

The book of Obadiah is the smallest book in the Old Testament. It is the smallest of the small minor prophets. Yet while this book is obscure and many may know nothing of its contents, it is not obsolete or insignificant.

One of the things I want us to focus on and think about is the contrast in our world today. Think about how much time, attention and resource are driven to a handful of people—people who are called “A-Listers”. Celebrities. People who are seen as the winners and the superiors in our society.

I find that even among those in the church, some find it easy to get caught up in a socially select group of gifted and talented people, but a group that does not represent the masses of people in the world—some who live their lives faithfully and responsibly

while in great need and crisis. Yet, how much more do we need to have the eyes and heart of God in looking at the world around us rather than to be caught up in the status wars and the celebrity interest that go on in the world around us?

While we live in a world that cares about “somebodys,” God cares and has His eye on the “nobodies”—those who are significant and important to Him.

That is exactly who we meet today in the life of this man and prophet, Obadiah.

Although the book of Obadiah is classified with the minor prophets, it is not “minor” because it is insignificant. It is minor simply because of its size in comparison to the “major” sizes of Old Testament books like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel.

Today the word, *minor*, almost always means something that is small, minimal, insignificant—"I had a minor thing happened today... I had minor surgery."

Although minor prophet books are much more compact, much smaller, that doesn't mean they are not important.

The book of Obadiah helps to establish a platform for conversation to address and ultimately, confront pride, prejudice and prosperity.

"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: 'Rise up! Let us rise against her for battle!' Behold, I will make you small among the nations; you shall be utterly despised. The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rock, in your lofty dwelling, who say in your heart, 'Who will bring me down to the ground?' Though you soar aloft like the eagle, though your nest is set among the stars, from there I will bring you down, declares the LORD" (Obadiah 1-4 ESV).

Notice in the first verse, it says, "The vision of Obadiah." The book of Obadiah opens, clearly stating that it is prophecy.

Prophecy

The book of Obadiah is a revelation of something that is

yet to come. The name, *Obadiah*, simply means *servant of the Lord*. So the prophecy of the *servant of the Lord* is to speak a judgment against a nation of people called the Edomites.

Who are the Edomites? When we look historically at these people and what this judgment is about, we discover there was an unresolved family feud between the nation of Israel and their cousins, the people of Edom.

When we read the opening verses of Obadiah, we are reading the judgment, sentencing phase of what is happening with Edom and Israel. But in order to understand the sentence that is coming and being handed down, we have to go back and take a peek into the history because present reality always flows out of history. We can change the future, but we cannot change the impact of the past.

We are first and foremost introduced to the Edomites in Genesis. The Bible tells us that Isaac, the son of Abraham, had two sons, Jacob and Esau. The Edomites are the descendants of Esau, and there was a conflict from the beginning.

"And the LORD said to her [Rebecca, the wife of Isaac], 'Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the older shall serve the younger'" (Genesis 25:23 ESV).

Esau was the older brother. In that time and culture, typically all blessings and inheritance went to the firstborn. But this Bible passage clearly says that the younger is going to rule over the older. In this case, Esau gave up his birthright to Jacob. Jacob received it and that was the beginning of the conflict.

I am unable to unpack all the history for you in the time we have, but let me show you Abraham's family tree.

Let's fast-forward to the book of Numbers. Several centuries later, Israel was held captive in Egypt by the pharaohs until Moses led them out of Egypt. When the Israelites were headed to the Promised Land, we learn in Numbers 20:14-21 that Moses sent word to the king of Edom and said (*paraphrased*), "You know all the hardship we have met, please let us pass through your land on our way into the land God has given to us." But the king of Edom refused passage and even mounted an

army to resist Israel so they could not pass through Edom.

This was a "turf war"—prejudice and conflict within a family and between people who otherwise belonged to one another.



Abraham had two sons: Ishmael and Isaac. Ishmael was born from the handmaiden and servant, Hagar. Isaac was born from the promise of God and Abraham's wife, Sarah. A large portion of the book of Genesis tells us about Abraham and the covenant God made with him.

Isaac then had two sons: Jacob and Esau. Jacob had 12 sons—the 12 tribes of Israel. But the descendants of Esau are the Edomites. This conflict that began even in the womb of Rebecca continues to unfold throughout history.

In time, the Edomites ultimately joined an alliance with the Ammonites and Moabites against the Israelites—their own cousins, their own family—and tried to bring war against them.

So after nearly 800 years of conflict, the prophet, Obadiah, stepped in and said that God is going to bring you [Edomites] down. (*paraphrased*) "God has seen your willing exultation of yourself above the people of Israel, and God is going to deal with you."

This is what the little “postcard prophecy” of Obadiah is about.

There is one other thing you need to know about Edom. The capital of Edom was Sela. Today, Sela has another name—Petra.



The large mass of land at the bottom of the map is the land of Edom. When Israel came out of Egypt on their way to the land of promise, they wanted to pass through Edom. It makes sense; it would have been a nice point of passage. But it was at Edom where they met resistance.

Quick Facts—Obadiah:

- Smallest of all Minor Prophets
- Name means “servant” or “worshipper of God”
- Contemporary of Jeremiah, the “weeping prophet”
- Prophecy regarding the doom of Edom, 585 B.C.
- Petra, capitol city of Edom

Petra was one of the great wonders of the world. It is also one of the most filmed places in the motion picture industry today. You might remember seeing Petra as the backdrop for *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, *The Mummy Returns* and *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen*. All of these were filmed around Petra with its hewed stone and red rocks.

When you begin to see this prophecy in the book of Obadiah, “The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rock, in your lofty dwelling,” the Edomites were living a prosperous, privileged and protected life in their day and time. They had carved out for themselves some sense of status, and they did not care about anyone or anything but themselves.

God gives this message, this prophecy of what is going to happen. In fact, the Bible tells us that God brought a full and final judgment on the people of Edom.

Judgment Phase:

- Descendants of Esau (Israel & Edom rivalry), Genesis 25:23
- Edomites denied the Israelites passage through their land, Numbers 20:14-21
- Joined with Ammonites and Moabites to attack Judah
- Herod (Edomite) —sought to kill Christ

From a historical time line, it is important to understand the city of

Jerusalem and the people of the southern kingdom (Judah) were plundered and taken into captivity in 586 B.C. by the Babylonians. But at the same time, another group of people came and attacked Edom in 585 B.C. The very people who stood by, watched the attack on Israel and did nothing, were ultimately themselves attacked and destroyed.

Pride

"The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rock, in your lofty dwelling, who say in your heart, 'Who will bring me down to the ground?' Though you soar aloft like the eagle, though your nest is set among the stars, from there I will bring you down, declares the LORD" (Obadiah 3-4 ESV).

The Bible tells us over and over again that God hates pride. Have you ever put on mosquito repellent in order to go outside and keep the mosquitoes away? If you want to keep God away, pride is a God-repellent.

"Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18 ESV).

Just as God is offended by pride, pride is what deludes us and often causes us to miss and fail to understand how vulnerable we really are. Pride exalts our sense of personal importance, making us think that we are the exception and that there will be no

consequences to our actions—we will not face the conflicts others face. We will never suffer. We are captains of our fate and masters of our soul.

It is also pride and presumption that creates a false security in life. Obadiah said of the Edomites that they thought they were safe because of where they were living. Their structures provided a false security.

Living in the southeast, we know that in SEC football, you had better not strut yourself too long after a win because you can come down very, very quickly. There is an ever-changing climate in a season of football, or whatever the sport.

The Bible says that God moves and works in nations, and He addresses the issue of pride.

Ultimately, what was the pride of Edom?

"Because of the violence done to your brother Jacob [Israel], shame shall cover you, and you shall be cut off forever. On the day that you stood aloof, on the day that strangers carried off his wealth and foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem, you were like one of them. But do not gloat over the day of your brother" (Obadiah 10-12a ESV).

The Edomites were indulgent and they let pride make them indifferent. As God dealt with this indifferent attitude that had

been so prominent among the Edomites, God said (*paraphrased*), "It is your indifference that I'm judging."

There is a strong message in this for us today. God doesn't tolerate the hidden subtleties of pride and the external exhibitions of indifference in our lives.

"For the day of the LORD is near upon all the nations. As you have done, it shall be done to you; your deeds shall return on your own head" (Obadiah 15 ESV).

Here is the prophecy (*paraphrased*): "Just as you have ignored the plight and needs of others, no one is going to be there to help you. No one is going to step in to intervene for you. You are going to experience the justice of God in the silence of your neighbors."

Martin Niemoeller was a Lutheran pastor who lived and ministered in Germany during the rise of Adolf Hitler and Nazism. Niemoeller went along with what was going on at the beginning. But as time unfolded and he realized what was happening in his nation to the people groups (in particular, to the Jews), Niemoeller tried to speak out. After some time, he found his efforts came too late.

I was in Boston about a year ago. While walking through the commons area, I noticed the words of Martin Niemoeller posted by the Holocaust Memorial:

*They came first for the
Communists,
and I didn't speak up because
I wasn't a Communist.*

*Then they came for the Jews,
and I didn't speak up because
I wasn't a Jew.*

*Then they came for the trade
unionists,
and I didn't speak up because
I wasn't a trade unionist.*

*Then they came for the Catholics,
and I didn't speak up because
I was a Protestant.*

*Then they came for me,
and by that time
no one was left to speak up.*

—Martin Niemoeller

We can never be indifferent. We need to voice, to act and respond to needs near and far in our world. As the people of God, we can never allow pride—even with the blessing of God in our lives—to keep us in a spirit of indifference with others.

Providence

Providence means *to oversee*. We see the oversight of God in the affairs of men and in the cause of nations. And God sees and moves when there is an indifference to evil.

"For the day of the LORD is near upon all the nations. As you have done, it shall be done to you; your deeds shall return on your own head" (Obadiah 15 ESV).

In Obadiah 15, God in His

providence, brings His wrath in time, in history and in the future against the nations of the world. But while the Bible is very clear that God in no way turns down and tones down His wrath, His wrath is consequential judgment with justice.

Edom refused to assist Israel, aligned with the enemies of Israel and rejoiced over the demise of Israel. And the inhumanity of Edom toward their fellow man and indignity toward God would ultimately be something to which they would have to answer. They were not exempt from God's judgment.

"The Lord hastens not after the manner of men; but at the same time, He knows His own seasons; and this is ever accomplished, that when the ungodly think themselves to be at rest then sudden destruction overtakes them... As God has proved Himself to be One who justly punishes sins with the respect to Israel and Judah, so also at length He will ascend His tribunal to judge all the nations... All in their different conditions shall be constrained to give an account of their actions, for the Lord will spare none." —John Calvin

God spoke a word of judgment and justice against Edom. But in the same book of Obadiah—a book that is severe, short, and very

much to the point— there is also this wonderful picture of God's compassion and grace:

"But in Mount Zion there shall be those who escape, and it shall be holy, and the house of Jacob shall possess their own possessions" (Obadiah 17 ESV).

"Saviors shall go up to Mount Zion to rule Mount Esau, and the kingdom shall be the LORD's" (Obadiah 21).

The Bible moves beyond the coming judgment to the promised hope that God gives, both to His people, Israel, and even the people of Edom. God is a God of grace and compassion. He is a God who, in His providence, moves, works, and acts on behalf of those who are in need.

I think this is where we focus our attention this morning in order to see the acts and movements of God—the places of need in our world.

Clearly, one of the greatest crises in the nations of the world today is an orphan crisis. There are many, many children who are neglected, sick and needy. But just as God had promised His people in that day a means of deliverance by His providence, I have watched that in every generation, God in providence moves and works on behalf of people.

One of the great works of God in our day is the work, *Home*

From Home. Started in Cape Town, South Africa, *Home From Home* is made up of a group of people who decided they could not stand by and watch, but they would mobilize and ultimately give themselves to making a difference to the grace of God.

One of those people uniquely gifted and used of God is Pippa Shaper. I am so very blessed to have her here today and I want to invite Pippa to join me at this time.

*Interview between
David McKinley and
Pippa Shaper, Co-Founder and
Managing Trustee of
Home From Home in South Africa*

Q. How did the Lord lead you into the work and establishment of *Home From Home*?

A: There have been a few times in my life where I felt God spoke so directly to me that there was no ignoring it.

The first time really was 21 years ago. I moved to South Africa from the United Kingdom with my South African husband at a really interesting time. Nelson Mandela had just been released. The country was going towards democracy and we were looking at a new future in South Africa. Then we had the '94 elections and it was a really, bad dangerous time—a time in which a lot of people where leaving South Africa. But we decided to stay.

In 1995, I remember this clearly. Having decided to stay in South Africa—in this new country with such promise and potential, but also a country with such problems—I absolutely knew there was no way I could ignore what was going on in the country. If I was going to stay, I had to do something to be part of the process of change.

My first calling was very much with children with HIV-AIDS. At that stage, we were working with a children's home and there was no treatment for children with HIV-AIDS. Children were coming into the home and they were getting sick and dying. In fact, it was much more like a hospice than a children's home. I became involved as a volunteer and I worked with them for 10 years with social worker and colleague, Jane Payne.

In 2005, I again felt an incredibly strong calling to start *Home From Home* and create a model of care in which we take no more than six children and place them into a foster home—a normal house on a normal street in a normal community with a foster mom or foster dad to bring them up and to be mom and dad to them.

Q: So the model you built upon is not one where you take children out of their community and put them, say, in an orphanage? You actually go into the community (into the streets where they would normally be and grow up) and you build a

home. You have a foster parent in that home who really becomes a parent and then provide the education, the medical services, and ultimately, spiritual training and nurture as well for children. Is that right?

A: That's right. Our foster parents become everything a normal parent would be. It is wonderful to see how families grow and we really build families at *Home From Home*. You can have a family with six children. Most of these children are not biologically related, but they become family. Their foster parents really become family.

Q: The children are different ages, is that right?—just like you would have in a family with birth children?

A: Yes. We made a very strategic decision at the beginning that we wouldn't have homes that just had all toddlers or all teenagers. Parents, do you agree that none of us could face that? On the whole, we have a mix of children within a house. Siblings are kept together and we have mixed houses—gender-wise as well.

We do happen to have two houses that have all boys in one and all girls in the other. The all girls' story is a wonderful one. We had five siblings (five sisters) who had been separated from their mom and had been scattered into different houses. The fact that we opened a new house meant these five girls could be reunited again into the same family.

Q: Incredible. How many homes to you have now?

A: We now have 34 homes with 200 children.

Q: How has God provided as you have made this journey and this decision?

A: It has been quite extraordinary how God really does provide when you surrender and say, "Okay, I'm following You. You've given me this vision on my heart and I'm going to follow what You want to do here."

He really has been so faithful. With finances—in many cases this is the hardest thing for a lot of organizations—we really have been happy and blessed by wonderful donors who have supported us since we started and continue to do so today. I think the most wonderful thing are the care providers and the interesting people we meet along the way. It really is about the people.

For example, last year at our five-year strategic planning session, we decided to make a real point of putting extra therapeutic care into our children's lives. Within the state system in South Africa, it is very unlikely you would get the help you need. As parents, if your child needs physical therapy, occupational therapy or speech therapy, you just go and do it. You would make that provision for your child. Within the State of South Africa, there is not that provision.

You might have to wait for months and months to get one or two appointments, but you just don't get what you need.

We decided at the end of last year to make that provision for our kids as if they were our own biological kids. And amazingly, having made that decision, a few weeks later I was running a workshop—completely nothing to do with *Home From Home*—when someone came to me and asked, "Could you use any therapeutic services for your children?" I answered, "Yes. Absolutely."

So right there and then, she said, "I have had this on my heart that I would like to provide that." She was an occupational therapist by training, and she has committed—they have committed—through a family trust to provide a certain amount of hours of occupational therapy for any of our children who need it.

So once again, providence met provision, and God moved in those ways.

Q: Tell us what is being done to nurture spiritual life in the lives of the children? You are obviously interfacing quite a bit when your government and using other vital resources, but share from your heart and from that of your board.

A: We very much let our foster mothers take the lead because it's about the family. Just as we

wouldn't expect outsiders to come into our own families and control how we are going to spiritually lead our children, we let our foster mothers take that lead and spiritually lead their children. So, of course, we have to make sure they have a good heart to begin with. We don't say which church they must attend. We work with church partners, but we very much let the foster moms work with the church they would like to.

As a result, the children are really brought up with a good spiritual surrounding and then we make sure that we bring in extra people to help as well.

One of those important groups is the annual trip of the Warren team.

I want to ask you about that because you are not just someone that we are meeting today, although some of us are meeting you for the first time.

I met you in Cape Town, South Africa, in about 2010, along with the team that went at that time. Since then, we have had people who are even here in this room with me and in our other venues that have been to Cape Town. And by the way, there are seven different venues all sharing in this interview today, both on this campus and in Grovetown, so we have people who can probably give a first-hand testimony.

Q: What has Warren been able to do to be a part of this work?

A: We so much look forward to the trips from Warren every year. There is a group of people who come in about February each year—which is wonderful weather, by the way. So I thoroughly encourage you to come in February. Through the trips over the past four years, we have built up a great program with our Warren team. There are about 10 to 12 people that come over and they provide incredibly practical help for us. As you can imagine with 34 homes, we need a lot of maintenance help.

The Warren team provides wonderful hands-on maintenance attention to our homes. They often do painting projects on a house or fix windows—which was last year's project. They really make a very practical difference to what is going on.

But on the other hand, they also bring this absolutely loving heart and caring compassion to our families. They have been able to build up a relationship with the families over the years. They do Bible study classes in the afternoon and fun craft activities with the children.

It was great to see the other day the craft activities the children did last year proudly displayed on the walls in one of the houses. The kids learn about Jesus and the love of Jesus from your Warren team.

That is so great to hear. I think that is one of the most incredible things about this particular

partnership. Some places we go require a different level of training to be able to do what we do, but really, if you just have a heart to go and help, the by-product is you get a vision of what is happening in South Africa. You get to interact and know people by name. You get to see how God is using *Home From Home*, and then you actually get to be a hands-on missionary in that process. It really is something wonderful.

Yes, it is really hands-on work, so it's fantastic. People enjoy getting to do something where they can see a difference at the end of their week with what they have done.

Absolutely.

Q: How can we pray? What is the burden of your heart in these days?

We don't want to just hear your voice (although we love hearing your accent and your articulation); we want to bear this work in our hearts—something of what God is doing in your life and through the work of *Home From Home* and its mission.

A: We would really appreciate your prayer on two fronts. It is all about growing up.

One request is on an organizational level. We are an organization that is 11 years old, and we need to move beyond

this stage—which is about the founders, Pippa and Jane, starting this organization. It will not be sustainable if it is just about us.

Home From Home has got to be moved forward into that new place where we have a fantastic team who can take it forward into the next stage of development—a committed team who is really stuck in and wants to take *Home From Home* to the next 10, 20, 30 years so it continues for the children. That is one place we would really appreciate prayer in terms of getting the right people in place so that it grows up to be a really successful, sustainable organization for decades to come.

And the other request is about growing up for our individual children. When we started *Home From Home*, we had lots of two-year-olds and three-year-olds and little kids. Now we have a lot of big kids, a lot of teenagers. And so those are the children who are going to be growing up and growing out into independent adults within the next few years.

These are children who have suffered a lot of loss in their lives, a lot of hardship. They have been through a lot of educational battles in their lives. Most of our kids are not going to get to college, but what they are going to get to do is hopefully learn a skill, to learn a trade, to learn some great life skills so that they can go out into the world as independent adults.

We are going to have success with some of them. If we don't have success, we are going to lose them along the way. We really are praying that the majority of our children are going to make it into really great, successful, loving, caring adults.

We want to put these things in our hearts and in our minds, and I hope all of us will write these requests down, praying for “growing up” for *Home From Home*.

It is incredible to have you here today. I wish we could have more time, but if you would like the opportunity to meet Pippa, she will be in our Global Café here on the Augusta campus between services. You might want to prayerfully consider being a part of the team that will be going back this year. We have information for you in the cafe.

As Pippa makes her way to the side of the platform, I just wanted you to see, through her testimony, how God has providentially taken a crisis in a nation and amid great brokenness, disease, suffering and conflict, God has brought together a point of grace, a place of mercy, and a place where the gospel is being shared, not only within the churches within the community, but also through a ministry like this that partners with churches and with others to be able to share in South Africa.

Although we live in a world that is crumbling and dissipating because of the brokenness and the reality of sin, and pride, and all of those things, our God is moving and working even in the worst of places and in the most difficult of circumstances to declare to us a message of hope. That is where the book of Obadiah ends; it ends with a promise.

Promise

“Saviors shall go up to Mount Zion to rule Mount Esau, and the kingdom shall be the LORD’s” (Obadiah 21 ESV).

The fallen, broken places of this world are not the final word. Though we see it and bear its impact, the ultimate hope is the promise of God. There is a coming kingdom and there is a Savior whose name is Jesus Christ. He is the One who from the covenant of Abraham to His coming to this earth—His death, burial, resurrection, ascension into heaven, and His promise of a return one day—the kingdom of God is going to be established.

This is what sets the agenda for our lives as believers and followers of Christ. Our lives are not about this earthly kingdom with all its kings, “A-Listers” and celebrities. Our concern is about the kingdom of God. This means that we intentionally and personally turn our attention from things that would attract attention in this world and we do what Jesus said:

“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matthew 6:33 ESV).

The providence of God is seen in His work in Israel and Edom, but the providence of God is also seen in our world today. In South Africa, Asia, America, South America, etc., God is raising up and sending out His people to go forward to offer help to the needs of people, and to offer the message of hope that can be found in Christ.

This is what we are about as a church: declaring the hope of the gospel. This is why we can never let pride get in the way. It can be easy in our world to let pride be our tripping point—always worried about what people think or say or whether they will criticize us if they know we are Christians, if they hear us speak about Jesus. Yet, Jesus is the one name, the one word on our lips and mind that can transform and change the future of the world for people. So we declare the message of Jesus Christ.

“Christians must live as the community of the King in a world dominated by the prince of darkness. Here and now, we are called to radical discipleship and fervent witness. We are to live as those who anticipate the full revelation of His glorious victory, following the ethical standards found in Scripture rather than the

guidelines of this evil age... This will require total commitment, something quite different from mere tokenism and superficial believism." —Mariano DiGangi

I think one of the greatest things God is doing providentially in our world right now is this: God is stripping us from cultural Christianity and He is calling us to biblical discipleship. As a church, it is our mission, our intentional focus, our calling to a higher standard of living in order to make a difference for Christ and His kingdom in these days and the days to come.



Father, I thank You for this testimony and the wonderful point of grace that we have seen You build and accomplish in these days, both in Home From Home in South Africa even as we see You working in our lives here in America.

God, we pray for our nation right now. We are in a time where we

are torn and broken, where strife and conflict between peoples within communities are at an all-time high. There is prejudice and racialism, and conflict over authority and rule. We just know that what we see in our world today is in unraveling that can only be fixed, not by forces from the outside, but a work in the heart.

I pray the message of the gospel might have impact on our lives and future in this community as we seek to live out the gospel in the discipleship to which Christ has called us. We pray that we would not see who we are, what we do or the people around us as minor, but that we would give ourselves fully to the work of Christ and to the glory of His name.

I thank You for this church and for what You are doing in it in these days. Raise us up, O God. Use us mightily by Your providence and fulfill Your purpose in your people called Warren. I pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

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