

Lifegroup notes from Sunday 9 October 2022

Reading: The Book of Obadiah

Part four in our current series on the Minor Prophets.

We don't know an awful lot about Obadiah. There are several men of this name mentioned in scripture, often they are advisors or officials, but there is no clear evidence that any of them is the Obadiah to whom is given this prophetic declaration of Judgement on the people of Edom (Esau's descendents).

In terms of timing, there are perhaps two periods where the events that Obadiah writes of in the past tense in verses 11-14 were a reality in Jerusalem. It's either the mid 800's BC or the events of 586 when Nebuchadnezzar swept through the city, destroying the buildings and taking away the ruling class and all leaders as exiles into Babylon. Since many of the words of judgement echo closely the judgements in Jeremiah 42, this leads me to believe they were contemporaries, and favours the later dating.

The background here is events that took place nearly a thousand years before, that we read of in Genesis 25-27 and the complex relationship between Esau and Jacob. Whereas in their lifetime there was some kind of reunion, for the subsequent generations the divisions between those two brother's houses continued, with Esau (Edom) often opposing Israel. The strong words of judgment here are because they stood by and watched as Jerusalem fell. More than that they gloated over it, stole wealth for themselves, and betrayed the people of God, handing them over to the enemy.

The first ripple of prophecy that I want us to see, echoed in the famous quote from Rev Dr King "Evil may so shape the events that Ceasar will occupy a palace and Christ a cross, but that same Christ will rise up and split history into AD and BC, so that even the life of Ceasar must be dated by His name. Yes "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice." (King himself here quoting from 19thC preacher Theodor Parker) God sees the big picture, He is aware of every injustice perpetrated against His people. At times we may look and wonder, even complain that the corrupt seem to flourish and prosper, but the prophetic word reminds us that God sees it all.

Secondly, I want us to see that the conflict described here finds its source in a bitter dispute between siblings, that is played out for many generations following. Perhaps you have experience of this, in real situations known to you, or in the history you have studied. If true and lasting reconciliation had been found between these two, there would be no cause for this judgement. I believe we need to hear that call to repair the damage that is being repeated in our families and networks generation after generation. Not merely ongoing disagreements and grudges, but cycles of every kind of evil that keep on repeating.

Finally for this message, there is a Day coming..... The Day of the Lord, when all God's judgement is finally revealed is a real thing. And, it's coming. Every generation since Christ has believed it might be in their lifetime (and so we really ought to live in the light of that expectation). Jesus describes something of that day in the vision of the sheep and goats in Matthew 25. It's a day of good news for those who follow Jesus, and bad news for those who do not. All that God had intended will finally come fully to pass, and all those who stood against it will find they are to be judged, by the one true and perfect Judge. Every foretaste of the Kingdom of God will give way to the full experience. As we remembered at the start. God sees it all, and the arc of our human story ends with perfect Justice (and hopefully perfect mercy!) being revealed.



Some questions

- What encouraged or challenged you in this message?
- Have you ever felt a sense of injustice that the evil prosper around us? What did you do with that?
- What injustices or oppressions do you think God will judge this generation for?
- Practically, how can we put an end to repeating patterns of divisions, or cycles of toxic and harmful behaviours?
- Have you put into practice steps to heal broken relationships? What happened?
- The Day of the Lord is coming, so how should we live in the light of that truth?