

Because of Your Violence

Obadiah 5-10

In this brief series from Obadiah, we are seeking to discover: How does God answer atrocities? When and why will God respond to massacres? History is littered with horrendous violence against helpless people groups. How will the Just God of all answer these atrocities?

- A Muslim mob massacred much of the Jewish population in Granada, Spain in 1066ⁱ
- In 1096, German Christians in “The People’s Crusade” killed 12,000 Jews in the Rhineland massacres
- Crusaders (who called themselves “Christians”) massacred hundreds of Jews and Muslims in Jerusalem in 1099 A.D.
- In May of 1182, Eastern Orthodox Christians killed 60,000-80,000 Roman Catholics at Constantinople in what has been called “The Massacre of the Latins.”
- In 1570, the Ottoman Turks conquered the island of Cyprus. They murdered 30,000-50,000 people.
- In 1894-1896, the Ottoman Turks destroyed between 100,000-300,000 Armenian Christians in the Hamidian massacres. An additional 15,000 to 30,000 were killed in the city of Adana in 1909.
- In 1937-1938, the Japanese killed 300,000 prisoners in the Nanking Massacre
- In 1944, Nazi Germans went house to house to murder 40,000-100,00 residents of Warsaw, Poland. They killed 6 million Jews in the Holocaust.
- In 1947-1951, the People’s Republic of China massacred between 2 million and 5 million people in the Landlord Purges and the Counterrevolutionary purge.ⁱⁱ

Human history is littered with the butchery of Adolf Hitler, Idi Amin, Mao Zedong, and Joseph Stalin. And we call ourselves “human beings!” What is God’s answer for these atrocities? Every human being is made in the image of the one true God. The glorious God made man in His image; rebellious mankind seems determined to mar this image at every turn. God chose a people for Himself to reveal His glory to the world. Yet each new day brings news of mankind’s rebellion in its persecution of the Jewish people. What is God’s answer for these atrocities? The Book of Obadiah displays the destiny of the nation of Edom, as part of God’s answer. Because of their violence, they were doomed as a nation.

God’s Answers in Obadiah

- In verses 1-4 God promised to bring down the nation of Edom
- In verses 5-10, God would destroy Edom because of their violence
- In verses 11-14, God would judge Edom because of their atrocities against Jewish people in their day of distress
- In verses 15-21, God promised to destroy not only Edom but all other nations that rise against His chosen people, Israel

Obadiah (whose name means “servant of God”) introduced the message in verse 1. In verses 2-18, the Lord Himself speaks. God gave Obadiah the final part of the message to write in verses 19-21.

Edom – the Descendants of Esau

The Edomites were the descendants of Esau, the twin brother of Jacob. Even while they were in the womb, there was contention between them. In full manhood, Esau wanted to murder Jacob, and Jacob

fled.ⁱⁱⁱ According to Genesis 33, when Jacob returned, Esau was reunited with him near the brook Jabbok. Esau's home was on Mount Seir, near the center of what came to be called "Edom." One of the counselors who visited Job was Eliphaz the Temanite^{iv}; in time Edom (or Teman) came to be known for its wisdom. Scripture gives us the general boundaries for Edom through stories such as the one in Numbers 20:14-21; Moses asked permission to pass through Edom but was refused. At times, Edom was at war with Israel. The nation probably reached its peak of greatness while Israel was enduring the Assyrian captivity.^v But a diplomatic message in Jeremiah 27 implies that there was a time of relative peace between Israel, Edom, and surrounding nations. Together they faced a threat from the Babylonian empire. But by the time Jeremiah 49 was written, Edom had betrayed and defiled Israel. Obadiah declared the message of God's ambassador to Edom and gave details about their cruelties. Obadiah's message is expressed in a similar way in Jeremiah 49:14-16. (See 49:7-22 for context.) According to Obadiah 3-4, Edom's national pride had deceived it. They thought that their geographic and strategic advantages would protect them. In their arrogance, they thought, "Who will bring me down?" The Lord not only declared the attitudes of their hearts, He also declared that He would bring them down to the ground.

What Would God Do Because of Their Violence?

➤ All Their Treasures Would Be Taken

⁵ If thieves came to thee, if robbers by night, (how art thou cut off!) would they not have stolen till they had enough? if the grapegatherers came to thee, would they not leave *some* grapes? ⁶ How are *the things* of Esau searched out! *how* are his hidden things [treasures] sought up!

Obadiah wrote in what has been called the "prophetic perfect" tense. What that means is that he wrote his prophecies with such certainty that it was as if they had already happened. ("how are his hidden things sought up!"). Ordinarily, thieves (or an invading force) would only take the most valuable things they could carry. For instance, bunches of grapes might be taken, but a few would be left. But God promised that everything of value would be taken because of their violence. Edom thought it had hidden its treasure so well that invaders could never find them all. The landscape around them was full of hidden turns and twists. It was easy to carve hidden caves out of the sandstone. But they had forgotten the God who sees all. They could run, but they could not hide. God would send hostile soldiers to take every treasure.

In our own country, we think our national wealth is secure. But the last time our national debt was paid off was 1835 under President Andrew Jackson. In recent years, the national debt has skyrocketed to \$23.2 trillion dollars while each year brings another \$1 trillion in debt.^{vi} And following the lead of our government, consumer debt now stands at \$14 trillion.^{vii} We think of our nation as impregnable, but we, our children and our grandchildren are actually quite vulnerable. Could this be because of our violence as a nation? It's time to search our souls and call upon our nation to repent.

➤ All Their Allies Would Turn on Them

⁷ All the men of thy confederacy have brought thee *even* to the border: the men that were at peace with thee have deceived thee, *and* prevailed against thee; *they that eat thy bread* have laid a wound [trap] under thee: *there is none* understanding in him.

Edom assured itself by reflecting on its treaties with allies. But the way they had turned on the people of Judah showed their true colors. When they saw that the Jewish people were under attack by mighty Babylon in 586 B.C., Edom turned on its brother nation. Edom was assured by its many alliances, and it would be deceived by its many allies. Obadiah predicted that their hospitable “allies” would deceive them, capture them, and take them to their borders. Even the great wisdom of Edom would not deliver him in the day of judgment. By their violence, they had made themselves the enemies of God.

➤ **All Their Wisdom Would Be Destroyed**

⁸ Shall I not in that day, saith the LORD, even destroy the wise *men* out of Edom, and understanding out of the mount of Esau?

“Archaeological and biblical evidence point to some time in the sixth century B.C. for the fulfillment of Obadiah’s prophecy of Edom’s destruction.^{viii} “That day” referred to in this passage is the day of God’s direct, obvious and open intervention leading to Edom’s destruction. Obadiah was careful to write “thus says the Lord” to emphasize God’s vengeance for Edom’s treachery. In our own country, we pride ourselves on our great universities and magnificent libraries. The wisdom of the ages seems to be hoarded within our borders. But God is able to destroy proud nations.

➤ **All Their Mighty Men Would Be Destroyed**

⁹ And thy mighty *men*, O Teman, shall be dismayed, to the end that every one of the mount of Esau may be cut off by slaughter.

Apparently, Edom was also proud of its military. Yet in that coming day of the Lord upon Edom, their mighty men would be stumble in dismay. Every person in the Mount of Esau would be put to death. And why would all these things happen? Verse 10 gives the answer:

¹⁰ For *thy* violence against thy brother Jacob shame shall cover thee, and thou shalt be cut off forever. Proverbs 3:31 uses the root word for “violence” to translate the word as “oppressor.” **“Envy thou not the oppressor, and choose none of his ways.”** In the next message, we will study Edom’s specific acts of violence more closely. But according to the Scriptures, Edom cheered on while Jerusalem was destroyed. Psalm 137 is a post-exilic psalm (meaning it was written as the Jewish people returned from captivity). The psalm implored the Lord (v.7), **“Remember, O LORD, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; who said, Raze it, raze it, even to the foundation thereof.”** Edom cheered the Babylonians on as they decimated Jerusalem and destroyed the temple. According to some historical sources, Edom may have even volunteered to destroy the Jerusalem temple^{ix}. God declared that He was displeased with those who **“helped forward the affliction”** of Jerusalem and Zion (Zechariah 1:15). (See Amos 1:11-12.) The Bible assigns specific responsibilities to godly saints; it assigns other responsibilities to governmental states. Be careful when hypocritical politicians play one against the other. They will attack states for not acting like saints, and vice versa. But it is time for us to do some soul-searching as a nation. Have we become casually murderous and turned a blind eye to sixty-one (61) million abortions? Can we turn a deaf ear to those around us being ravaged by substance abuse? Without a specific Scriptural connection, we have to be careful about connecting modern calamities to specific causes. But we ought to ask ourselves some soul-searching questions. Over the last several months, the nation of China has been persecuting Chinese believers (and other groups). News reports indicate that churches

have been destroyed; Scriptures are being replaced with quotes from a dictator.^x But yesterday, we learned that this Chinese dictator is in hiding while the novel coronavirus is infecting the nation's citizens. Does God still have the power to humble a nation? Can He use the health of its leaders? Just ask Herod in Acts 12:20-23.

Does God have an answer for this violence? Is there an answer for these atrocities? Isaiah 53:8-9 uses this same word for violence: **"⁸ He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken. ⁹ And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither *was any* deceit in his mouth."** Yes, God has the Answer for the violence of the nations. It began when He sent His Son, Jesus, to this Earth as He had promised. Isaiah declared that He was our Substitute: **"for the transgression of my people was he stricken."** God the Father sent His Son, Jesus, to die for your sins, including your personal violence. Violent men rose up against Jesus, but He rose again from the dead and now calls upon you to repent from your wickedness, including your violence. We need not envy the oppressor; God has the answer for atrocities. And may God help us as we call upon our nation to repent and turn to the One who did no violence, before it is too late for our country.

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ⁱ These massacres are listed on Wikipedia at

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_events_named_massacres

ⁱⁱ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_massacres_in_China

ⁱⁱⁱ Genesis 27:41

^{iv} Job 2:11

^v J.R. Bartlett, Edom and the Fall of Jerusalem, 587 B.C. Accessed at

<https://www.andrews.edu/weblmsc/moodle/public/courses/relb274/lesson10/Bartlett%20Edom%20and%20the%20Fall%20of%20Jerusalem.pdf>

^{vi} Adam Andrzejewski, director of Open The Books (www.openthebooks.com), citing Forbes magazine, February 6, 2020 "Forbes: Trump's New War On Wasteful Spending - An Advance Draft Of The President's Budget To Congress - FY2021" <https://www.openthebooks.com/forbes-trumps-new-war-on-wasteful-spending---an-advance-draft-of-the-presidents-budget-to-congress---fy2021/>

^{vii} <https://www.debt.org/faqs/americans-in-debt/>

^{viii} Billy K. Smith and Franklin S. Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, vol. 19B, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 187.

^{ix} The apocryphal book of 1 Esdras 4:45

^x Steven W. Mosher, "How China's Xi Jinping destroyed religion and made himself God" New York Post, February 1, 2020, accessed at <https://nypost.com/2020/02/01/how-chinas-xi-jinping-destroyed-religion-and-made-himself-god/>