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Deliverance in Trouble

A rather amazing fact when it came to the destruction of the theocracy in 586 BC and the dispersion of God's people is that though God's people initially were the ire of the nations — the Assyrians, Babylonians, and the like, nevertheless *they thrived in the places God brought them!* In fact, seventy years later, when God allowed His people to return to Jerusalem under Cyrus, only 42,360 people returned (out of what is estimated to be more than a million Jews living in Babylon at the time).¹

Clearly the exile didn't harm Judaism. In fact, in exile God's people thrived such that by the time of Christ, Judaism was so entrenched in Babylon that when a Jew travelled from Babylon to Palestine, they would not wipe the dust off their feet when entering the city. The land of Babylon had become the land of God's people!

And so far from struggling and diminishing in exile, God's people flourished there! Why is that? Aside from the obvious, God's will, there is no question that the pastoral care of the prophets played a large part. As we have seen, the books they wrote are filled with encouragements, explanations, instructions, and rebukes which clearly led God's people, in the midst of their suffering, "beside quiet waters" and "into green pastures!"

Obadiah 15-20 is an example of the pastoral care God's people received at the hands of Obadiah! The year is 586 BC. Jerusalem has fallen in accordance with the promise God made to His people under Moses (cf. Leviticus 26). And though God's people were enchained and on their way to who knows where or what (we know it was Babylon), nevertheless God initially comforted His people with the words that are before us! The first word of encouragement is that God is protective of His people and gives them relief in the storms of life.

Obadiah 17a, "But on Mount Zion..."

Based on context, the "but" in this case is a massive adversative, calling us to consider the contrast when it came to the treatment of the non-believer and the believer. It is this adversative alone that serves as the first word of encouragement. As we saw in vv. 15-16, the "day of the Lord" is fast approaching when all mankind will stand before God and render account for their deeds done in the flesh. What a horrible and terrifying day that will be! As Joel said:

Joel 2:1b-2a: "...the day of the Lord is coming; surely it is near, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness..."

The language here is of a massively threatening storm that was coming to the land and which would destroy all nations! And yet against this dark and bleak backdrop, we read these words:

Obadiah 17a, "BUT ON MOUNT ZION."

Two simple words in the Hebrew, but they convey so much!

- Yes, the non-believer will stand before God and be condemned, "But on Mount Zion..."
- Yes, the last days will be horribly difficult- so much so the non-Christian will long for their death (Revelation 6:16), "But on Mount Zion..."
- Yes, the wrath of God will be poured upon this creation and all in it will suffer, "But on Mount Zion..."
- Yes, when the last rebel is sorted out, placed among the goats on Christ's left, and then

cast into the Lake of Fire, nevertheless there will be those “on Mount Zion...”

The first point Obadiah is making here is that as bad as it will be for the non-believer (and it’s going to be bad as we consider the Lake of Fire), it is going to be just the opposite for those “...on Mount Zion...”

How is that? It is because of what Mount Zion is! We’ve already addressed this in part when we looked at vv. 5-6.² Recall, “Mount Zion” was one of the many mountain peaks of the Central Mountain Range running through Palestine. In Redemptive History this particular mountain peak witnessed two significant Redemptive events:



- Abraham offering his son, Isaac, as a sacrifice, yet God providing a “ram” in his place. That was on Mount Zion!
- Another Father offering His Son, but this time no substitute was given- in fact, the Son WAS the substitute, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!³

Now the audience of Obadiah would NOT have been privy to the latter. So, in light of the former, Abraham’s sacrifice of his son, what would “Mount Zion” have meant to God’s people? Mount Zion meant nothing less than the place of substitution, redemption, and so RELIEF! Think of it! Abraham was NOT threatened here; it was Isaac. That which threatened Abraham was the enormous weight that hung around his neck as he walked to the place where he was called to sacrifice his son!! For a ram to be caught in a thicket meant a world of relief for this patriarch!

Because this was the comfort given to the people of God here. As they entered into exile, in contrast to the treatment of God’s enemies, the Lord’s plan for His people was for their welfare!⁴

Talk about Relief! In a world fraught with trial, difficulty, and uncertainty, the believer stands on a Rock that cannot be moved, that Rock is Mount Zion!⁵ As such, they/we have the glorious comfort in knowing that while the world may be falling apart all around us, we remain the object of God’s love and care! It reminds me of the words of Christ in John:

John 16:33, “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation...”

In the world God’s people are placed in chains and brought where they do not want to go (in Obadiah’s day, that was Babylon)! They remain the object of attack, ridicule, and abuse. And they suffer on account of Christ. “...But take courage; I have overcome the world.” Truly, while the storms of life rage around us making our world uncertain at best, in Christ/on

Mount Zion the Christian forever lives in the eye of the storm where all is calm, peaceful, and rest!

The first blessing God gives to His people in exile is the promise of relief! Notice the second blessing is deliverance in trouble.

Obadiah 17b, "But on Mount Zion there will be those who escape..."

The word *escape* is NOT the best translation for this word (though not incorrect). The American concept of "escape" denotes missing something bad (which is not part of this word). A gunman entered into an establishment and you "escaped" because you hid in a closet or played dead. Again, that is NOT the idea in this word. The primary focus of this word (פְּלִיטָה [pə'li'tâ]) is that of "deliverance brought about through the work and sacrifice of another." God speaking about His people on account of the threat of Egypt said this in 2 Chronicles:

2 Chronicles 12:7, "I will not destroy them but will soon give them deliverance." (NIV)

At this time in Redemptive History, God's people did NOTHING to be protected from Egypt; it was all God! Joseph speaking of his brothers said this:

Genesis 45:7, "And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance."

Here and again God's people did nothing to bring about their deliverance from the famine... God did it through Joseph! Accordingly, the "deliverance" speaks of people who are delivered through the sole activity of another!

Ezra speaking of the return from exile said this:

Ezra 9:8-9a, "But now for a brief moment grace has been *shown* from the Lord our God, to leave us an escaped remnant and to give us a peg in His holy place, that our God may enlighten our eyes and grant us a little reviving in our bondage. For we are slaves; yet in our bondage, our God has not forsaken us, but has extended lovingkindness to us in the sight of the kings of Persia..."

Again, the word conveys the idea of a people enjoying freedom on account of the work/will of another! It is this "deliverance" that is in mind in Obadiah!

Yet there is more! For the deliverance of God in this state has a notable element to it: God's deliverance speaks primarily of a deliverance NOT *FROM*, BUT *IN* the storm!

- Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego were delivered NOT *from* the fiery furnace, BUT *in* the fiery furnace.

- Noah was NOT delivered *from* the flood, BUT *in* the flood.
- God’s people were NOT delivered *from* the Red Sea, BUT *in* the Red Sea.
- Daniel was delivered NOT *from* the lion’s den, BUT *in* the lion’s den.
- The deliverance Christ grants through His cross is NOT *from* the trials and difficulties of this life (though ultimately, someday that will be the case), BUT *in* the trials and difficulties.

That is the deliverance referenced in Obadiah. It was NOT God’s intention to deliver His people *FROM* the trials and difficulties of exile, BUT to strengthen, encourage, and uphold them *IN* exile!⁶

We need to hear this! Somehow today Christians have arrived at the false notion that if we are saved by Christ, we ought to be saved/delivered *FROM* bad people or bad situations. This wreaks havoc with our faith, for when trial comes, what is the first thing we question?

- Ourselves- specifically our faith or our worthiness!
- But this doesn’t last long for soon we begin to question the goodness of God!

How sad and unnecessary! The child of God who thrived in exile did NOT do so because God delivered him *OUT* of exile. RATHER he thrived because *IN* and *THROUGH* it all, God walked with him, strengthened him, and encouraged him. Recall the words of Christ NOT to the non-Christian, BUT His people:

Revelation 3:20: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me.”

That is the second blessing that God gives to His people in exile; it is the “...lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20) Deliverance *IN* Trouble!

That brings us to a third blessing that God grants His people (in contrast to the wicked); to His people belong a commitment on the part of God as it relates to their maturation,

Obadiah 17a, “But on Mount Zion there will be those who escape, and it [Mount Zion/the place where God’s people will work out their salvation] will be holy...”

The latter phrase is a declaration of what Mount Zion was going to be, but not “HOW?” it was going to be! From the rest of Scripture, we know that the “How?” is God! To see this, we begin by defining the terms.

The word “holy” is קֹדֶשׁ (*qōdeš*) which references “the state of that which belongs to the sphere of the sacred.” To understand this, we begin with the holiness of God. When we say that God is holy, we really are speaking to that which God is *NOT*! Holy means transcendent, other, above, or beyond. As creatures, everything we know and understand is

part of creation. That is why, when the non-Christian invents a deity, the being is composed of creaturely elements and attributes.⁷

Yet realize that when we speak of God, we are speaking of a Being that is NOT created and therefore NOT part of this creation. And when we speak of this, we are speaking of His holiness. And so to say that God is holy in His:

- Love- is to say that His love is NOT like our love at all.
- Mercy- is to say that His mercy is NOT like our mercy.
- Power- is to say that His power is NOT like our power.
- Justice- is to say that His justice is NOT like our justice.

This explains why when morally pure angels stand in the presence of God, they are brought to the end of themselves crying, “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts” (Isaiah 6:3a)! They are amazed NOT because God is morally pure (though that is amazing), BUT because God is totally unlike anything they know!

Now as God is holy, anything that comes in association with God becomes other/different- *it enters the sphere of the sacred!* And so we read in Scripture about these things:

- A holy nation (Exodus 19:6).
- Holy ground (Exodus 3:5).
- A holy day (Nehemiah 10:31)
- A holy assembly (Exodus 12:16).
- A holy place (Exodus 29:30-31).
- Holy food (Exodus 29:34).
- Holy garments (Exodus 35:21).
- Holy gifts (Leviticus 22:3ff).
- Holy utensils (1 Kings 8:4).
- A holy temple (1 Chronicles 29:3).
- A holy mountain (Psalms 2:6).
- A Holy Spirit (Psalms 51:11)
- Holy land (Psalms 78:54).
- Holy attire (Psalms 96:9).
- A holy name (Psalms 103:1).
- A holy city (Isaiah 52:1).
- A holy arm (Isaiah 52:10).
- A holy allotment (Ezekiel 45:7).
- Holy chambers (Ezekiel 46:19)
- A holy war (Micah 3:5).
- Holy meat (Haggai 2:12)
- A holy habitation (Zechariah 2:13).
- Holy messengers (Mark 8:38).

- Holy prophets (Luke 1:70).
- Holy offspring (Luke 1:35).
- A holy kiss (1 Corinthians 16:20).
- Holy hands (1 Timothy 2:8)
- A holy calling (2 Timothy 1:9).
- Holy brethren (Hebrews 3:1).
- A holy commandment (2 Peter 2:21).
- Holy men (Exodus 22:31).
- Holy people (Deuteronomy 28:9).

In all of these examples what comes to our minds first is NOT that of moral purity, BUT something being set apart unto a holy end- a telos that is NOT of this world!⁸

That thirdly constitutes a commitment on the part of God when it came to His exiled people. As they in Christ have been brought to a place that is holy — Mount Zion — God therefore is all about making His people holy NOT just in their position, BUT also in their practice — that is the idea behind the added statement, “...and it will be holy!” And so we read the comforting words of Paul:

Philippians 1:6, “*For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.*”

This in a nutshell is a statement of the purpose behind God’s providences in your life! God’s agenda for your life is NOT happiness, success, health, pleasure, and the many other things we in America think is important to God! God is all about making us fit for heaven! Recall Christ’s washing of the disciple’s feet and His words to Peter who already was saved?

John 13:6-8, “And so He came to Simon Peter. He said to Him, ‘Lord, do You wash my feet?’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘What I do you do not realize now, but you shall understand hereafter.’ Peter said to Him, ‘Never shall You wash my feet!’ Jesus answered him, ‘If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.’”

Christ here is NOT talking about Peter’s redemption, but His sanctification/holiness. Accordingly, He is saying, “*Peter if I don’t sanctify you/wash your feet, you cannot be with me!*”

Speaking of Satan, Peter wrote this:

1 Peter 5:9-10a, “But resist him, firm in *your* faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen *and* establish you...”

This is what God was all about when it came to His people the wilderness/diaspora. He was

about perfecting them, growing them in the love of the Lord and the fear of Christ! And so we read of God's point after calling Hosea to purchase his now enslaved wife for the sake of her cleansing and purity:

Hosea 3:4-5, "For the sons of Israel will remain for many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or *sacred* pillar, and without ephod or household idols [that is that Babylon was. Now what was God's end-game?]. Afterward the sons of Israel will return and seek the Lord their God and David their king; and they will come trembling to the Lord and to His goodness in the last days."

This is God's will for us in Christ Jesus, our sanctification. As such, this is what God is working out in all of His children in exile.

The third blessing God gave to His people in exile was a commitment to their growth, maturation, and so holiness! As that is the case, what difference ought this to have in the lives of God's exiles?

1 John 3:2-3, "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. [That is God's program/agenda! What is the natural response?] And everyone who has this hope *fixed* on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure."

Knowing that holiness is God's agenda for our lives naturally creates in us a commitment to that agenda. We see it in Revelation 14! Referencing the Mount Zion motif, God gave this description of that to which He is leading everyone in Christ. Speaking of His people in the future standing with Christ on Mount Zion we read this:

Revelation 14:4-5, "These are the ones who have not been defiled with women, for they have kept themselves chaste. These *are* the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These have been purchased from among men as first fruits to God and to the Lamb. And no lie was found in their mouth; THEY ARE BLAMELESS."

That is, holy!

1 Peter 1:15-16: Peter saw the obvious implication of living in communion with a Holy God, "But like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all *your* behavior; because it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'"

This no doubt is why God's people in the exile became quite serious about their moral conduct. In fact, it was during this time that the Oral Law (the Mishnah) arose which sought to make God's word live-able/doable for God's people. Yet sadly, God's people became unbalanced at this point. Forgetting that it is God who must work holiness out in our lives, the Jews sought to acquire it in the flesh:

Matthew 23:15, 23-24, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel about on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves... Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!”

Christian how important it is that we learn from their mistake. The third blessing God gave to His people in exile was a commitment to their holiness. Yet this would be worked out NOT as God’s people worked harder! Rather, it was intended by God to be the overflow of their love and dependence upon Christ!

John 14:15, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.”

This is where God would have us all to live. In response to God’s program of holiness for our lives, in love we are called to participate. As this occurs, we enjoy the third blessing God promised His people in exile!

End Note(s)

¹ cf. Ezra 2:64.

² The message in those verses was so bleak, I didn’t want to leave it without referencing this verse.

³ Accordingly and not surprisingly, in Scripture “Mount Zion” is associated with “the heavenly Jerusalem” (cf. Hebrews 12:22), “the Jerusalem that is above” (Gal. 4:26).

⁴ cf. also Revelation 14:1.

⁵ Clearly Obadiah here is quoting from Joel 2:32!

⁶ Mount Zion was NOT given to the people of God that they might escape life. Mount Zion was given that they might have a rock upon which to stand facing life!

⁷ A. W. Tozer wrote, “We learn by using what we already know as a bridge over which we pass to the unknown. It is not possible for the mind to crash suddenly past the familiar into the totally unfamiliar. Even the most vigorous and daring mind is unable to create something out of nothing by a spontaneous act of imagination. Those strange beings that populate the world of mythology and superstition are not pure creations of fancy. The imagination created them by taking the ordinary inhabitants of earth and air and sea and extending their familiar forms beyond their normal boundaries, or by mixing the forms of two or more so as to produce something new. However beautiful or grotesque these may be, their prototypes can always be identified. They are like something we already know.” (*The Knowledge of the Holy*, p. 14)

⁸ We see this concept clearly in Ezekiel 22:26. Here God indicted the priests on account of their rebellion, “Her priests have done violence to My law and have profaned My holy things; they have made no distinction between the holy and the profane, and they have not taught the difference between the unclean and the clean...” Do you see? That which is holy first and foremost is expected to be used unto a unique purpose, namely the service and honor of God!