

Practical Proverbial, from Obadiah, 4 January 2021 Today's topic: About Obadiah

The vision of Obadiah. This is what the Sovereign Lord says about Edom: We have heard a message from the Lord: An envoy was sent to the nations to say, "Rise, let us go against her for battle." Obadiah 1 (NIV).

Welcome back to the Old Testament, the Bible that Jesus learned and quoted. Let's spend some time in its shortest book, written by a prophet named Obadiah.

Obadiah was one of the twelve minor prophets of the Bible (the others being Hosea, Joel, Amos, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habbakuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi), whose books are placed, largely in chronological order, after Daniel. They are the last books of the Old Testament. It is thought that Obadiah was written during the time when Israel was held captive in Babylon. The name Obadiah means "servant (or worshiper) of Yahweh," and the theme of the book the triumph of God over Edom (present day area of Israel and Jordan).

Now the big questions: so what, and why now?

As to the first question, this particular verse is a call to arms for the people of God. The nation of Edom descended from Esau, Jacob's brother. Carrying out the tradition of its forefather, Edom despised God's chosen people, Israel, and the two related peoples were enemies. Saul and David fought repeated battles against Edom, and while Edom was never fully subdued, it was governed by Israel while David was king. When Israel was destroyed by the Babylonians, Edom rejoiced. In fact, it helped the Babylonians destroy Israel. Is it any wonder, then, that God would want for His people to defeat a related foe who had rejected Him and plundered His temple? Read Isaiah 63 to learn more.

You and I: is God calling us to arms to live our lives as His foot-soldiers so that He might work His justice through us?

But as to why this matters, look no further than your nightly news. Our world today is as upside-down as was ancient Israel's. Economic inequities, political criminalities, social abominations, degenerative popular culture: in many ways, it seems like we could be Edom. So many of us paint ourselves as people victimized by a judgmental God who checked out long ago. Yet we yearn for justice, for law and what is right to prevail.

You and I: in these days of injustice, do we need a reminder of God's presence?

The short book of Obadiah prophesies that God will pronounce His justice on a people who rejected Him. That He is the King of Kings who will reign supreme forever. It was written hundreds of years before Jesus yet points to Him as the final judge, and victor, over His enemies.

For further reading: Isaiah 1:1, Isaiah 11:14, Isaiah 63:1-6, Jeremiah 49:7-22, Ezekiel 25:12-14, Obadiah 2

Lord Jesus, thank You for Your words spoken through Obadiah and the other prophets.

Practical Proverbial, from Obadiah, 5 January 2021 Today's topic: Big For Our Britches

See, I will make you small among the nations; you will be utterly despised. Obadiah 2(NIV).

We, who are foot-soldier's in the Lord's Army of believers, who constantly need reminders that He is with us and over us, need to remember that we can become too big for our britches.

My wife and I are watching, "The Crown." We've come into the 21st century and have learned to binge on streaming TV, and our latest binge is the ongoing series about the House of Windsor. One of the series' continual themes is how the British monarchy works to keep both itself and Great Britain (as a whole) relevant in the modern world. For decades, England has been a world power in decline on the world stage and the series deals with this reality in the context of examining the functions, place, and purposes of the royal family amidst this political decline.

Could it be that great powers decline when they think God has abandoned them?

Today's verse is talking about Edom. Obadiah's prophecy is directed at Edom, the descendants of Esau, and, Obadiah's time, a great regional power. The prophecy predicts that Edom, led by its leaders (who have gotten too big for their britches), will be brought down. God would use Israel to defeat the enemy that had participated in Israel's downfall. If you were an Edomite, it would have been a good time to get your affairs in order because you were about to feel very alone.

In a way, the prophecy is also about Jesus defeating evil. He did it at Calvary, in the garden tomb, and will do so again when He returns to set all things right. Instead of simply defeating Israel's (and His) enemies, Jesus Himself will defeat the source of what made them enemies; He will defeat the leader of evil, then those who follow. Satan, your days are numbered. They always have been.

Yet we need to remember that it is God who will bring down the great powers. He will work through us, but the strength, the power, the glory all belong to Him. While we're celebrating His victory, we need to keep our heads and not let them swell. Christ will defeat Satan. We are but His soldiers.

The British government of fifty years ago might have done well to learn that lesson. While hardly being evil like Edom, in their striving to become a new post-war power, the government seemed to get awful big for its britches. Perhaps ours has as well. Thank the Lord that He is forgiving, patient, and willing to take us back when we've crossed a line. He would have done the same for Edom, but they never bothered to find out.

For further reading: Numbers 24:18, Obadiah 3

Lord Jesus, thank You for humbling us, for sending us reminders to not be too proud.

Practical Proverbial, from Obadiah, 6 January 2021 Today's topic: What About Us?

The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rocks and make your home on the heights, you who say to yourself, 'Who can bring me down to the ground?'. Obadiah 3 (NIV).

None of us are too big for our britches. There isn't one person alive on planet Earth right now who God can't pull down or lift up. The earth and everything in it is His to deal with as He pleases. That includes you and me, our country, our families; everything. Don't go thinking that this is some sick game where God plays with people for His own divine jollies. No, we are His to do with as He pleases, trusting that He is all love, justice, truth, and glory. He has never done or said anything to prove this wrong. Whatever He does, He does in love and for what is best.

Yet how many people have put their faith in other people only to have those other people let them down? I've let people down. People I know and love put their faith and trust in me and I let them down. Be honest with yourself and admit that you've done the same. So have our politicians. So have our celebrities. So have our sports heroes, pastors, teachers, best friends, Instagram influencers, and even the guy bringing your Door Dash.

It's what we do because we're human. Got skin? Got sin. Our sin separates us from God. We're sinners and sinners sin. Thank God for Jesus who makes us righteous, who makes the naturally unworthy into unnaturally worthy.

And still, despite all He does for us as a free gift, there are folks who say, "I'm better than that." "I don't need your Jesus; I don't want Him." "All that Bible stuff is just made-up fairy tales written by angry white men." There are so many people in our world who reject this Savior named Jesus, who honestly believe themselves to be more, to be better than Him (and especially those of us who believe in Him). You know them. Social media is full of them. So is Capitol Hill. So is Hollywood.

And so is your neighborhood, my church, our circles of friends. Got skin? Got sin. Obadiah prophesied about how the Edomites set themselves up against – and over – God and God's chosen people. Yet thousands of years later, if we're honest, we must admit that we are sometimes the Edomites, that we succumb to our sinful desires and start thinking in ways that are too big for our britches.

When God has had enough of that, He can remove His protection over us. He did for Edom and they were brought down. What about us?

For further reading: 2 Chronicles 25:11-12, Isaiah 16:1-6, Obadiah 4

Lord God, forgive my judgmental pride, my haughty attitude, my callous thoughts.

Practical Proverbial, from Obadiah, 7 January 2021 Today's topic: Hubris and Space

Though you soar like the eagle and make your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down," declares the Lord. Obadiah 4 (NIV).

Continuing on the theme that nobody is too big to fall down, consider the American space program.

The American manned space program began with Project Mercury, which put Americans in space from 1959-1963. Mercury taught astronauts how to perform basic tasks with spaceflight. Mercury was followed by Project Gemini, which launched ten two-man crews into orbit so that sixteen different men could learn to perform more complex tasks in space in preparation for traveling to the Moon. Gemini was then followed by the Apollo Moon Program, which sent thirty-one men into space, including missions to and from the Moon. After the Apollo program concluded, nine men flew to Skylab in 1973-74, then another three on the joint US-Soviet Union Apollo-Soyuz mission of 1975. Six years later, the space shuttle began to take people into space, flying 355 people over a thirty-year period. Last, starting in 2020, the SpaceX program has successfully launched six people to the International Space Station. Not counting people launched by the Russians, as of today, the United States has sent 426 people into space, twelve of them to the Moon.

Yet all of this happened at a high cost. Between 1967 and 2003, 17 people were killed in space flight activities. The first three Apollo astronauts were killed in the 1967 Apollo 1 fire. In 1986, all seven astronauts were killed when the space shuttle Challenger exploded. Finally, the space shuttle Columbia broke apart over Texas in 2003, killing its crew of seven as well. In every new endeavor, lives are often lost, and space exploration is no different; the Russians won't even say how many cosmonauts have died. But you can't be brought any lower than to die, to pay the ultimate price while trying to attain the highest heights.

Did God cause those deaths? No, not likely. Yet it's hard to say that man's pride isn't partly responsible. In all three tragedies, safety deficiencies were fully or responsibilities. "Safety deficiencies" equal "hubris."

Hubris is what Edom was guilty of. When Obadiah prophesied that God would bring Edom down, he was prophesying that God would break their hubris; He would crush their pride. If doing that destroyed Edom as a power, as Abraham Lincoln quoted, "the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether."

So it was with Edom. So it is with us. I admire those who fly into space. Theirs is a courageous trade and they are some of the greatest of Americans. Space is our future, and they are heroic pioneers. I only hope that those who built their spacecraft shed their hubris.

For further reading: Job 20:6, Psalm 19:9, Isaiah 10:14, Isaiah 14:13, Obadiah 5

Lord Jesus, Your judgments are true and righteous altogether

Practical Proverbial, from Obadiah, 11 January 2021 Today's topic: Tweet That For Me, Please

"If thieves came to you, if robbers in the night—oh, what a disaster awaits you!—would they not steal only as much as they wanted? If grape pickers came to you, would they not leave a few grapes? Obadiah 5 (NIV).

So, I'm one of the Twitter users who was permanently deleted last week. I didn't incite violence; I didn't libel anyone; I didn't cause or call for anyone's harm. I DID deserve it, however, because I said unkind things of a political nature to people who, I selfishly thought, deserved to hear them. In doing so, I incurred the wrath of the Twitter masters and they banned me. It's their platform and they may do as they please.

I was one of thousands, maybe millions, whose accounts were deleted last week. From the hue and cry by my fellow ex-Tweeters, you'd think it was a cataclysm. It wasn't. And, from the hue and cry by the media, government officials, and political n'er-do-well's, you'd think last week's protest in Washington was incomparable insurrection. It wasn't. And, from those who now wonder what's in store for America since unseen dark forces boldly affect our speech, you'd think it was the end of the world. Again, it wasn't.

In fact, according to Obadiah (and every other Bible prophet), none of what we're going through now is anywhere near as bad as what'll happen at the end of the world. Maybe that's starting now; we'll find out. If so, be ready. Confess, repent, and let Jesus take control of you. That matters so much more than this blog, our jobs, Joe Biden, or anything else happening here on the Third Rock. Certainly more than Twitter. It matters because, when the end comes, it will be terrible for those who do not have hope – the promise – in the Lord.

In those days, the space program won't matter. The presidency won't matter. The mainstream media won't matter. Social media, NFL kneeling, political differences, internet speeds, or COVID-19 vaccines won't matter. It won't be like the Black Death of the 1300s, and it won't be like living through the Holocaust, and it won't be like touring the Cambodia killing fields amidst the bones of 2 million innocents.

Oh no, my friend, you know it will be much worse. Obadiah predicts it here. The masters of Twitter are like petty robbers, leaving crumbs behind. The master *they* unwittingly serve, however, has much worse in store, yet he is already defeated. Before that happens, things will get much harder. Jesus foretells of it. Without hope in Him, things will get much, much worse. He is the only escape. Go ahead and Tweet that for me, please.

For further reading: Deuteronomy 4:27, Deuteronomy 24:21, Isaiah 24:13, Obadiah 6

Lord Jesus, our only Savior, forgive my sins. Have mercy on us sinners. And abide with us until Your return.

Practical Proverbial, from Obadiah, 12 January 2021 Today's topic: Jesus, Not Things

But how Esau will be ransacked, his hidden treasures pillaged. Obadiah 6 (NIV).

Back to Edom. After reminding us that the mighty will be brought down in the terrible days of the end, Obadiah brings us back to his prophecy of how Edom, the unbelieving descendants of Esau, will be one of them.

Hint: so will we.

There are many things I own that I value. My wife and I write a Christmas journal; we have since 2013. In it, we write down Christmas memories, record events that happen each holiday season, and keep Christmas pictures and favorite cards. It has become one of my treasured keepsakes, and if the house were burning down, it's one of the things I'd grab as we ran out the door. I want to preserve it for my kids and grandkids. There are other things I own to which I have sentimental attachment. Furniture, paintings, keepsakes, books: some are valuable, some aren't. Yet I'm attached to them all the same.

Reminder: none of these things really matters. In the end, they will all be gone. When I meet Jesus, and when you meet Jesus, we won't be holding our possessions. In this life, if someone took my most cherished possessions, or if they were lost, I'd be grieved. Yet, when I die, they won't be mine anymore. They will go to someone else: someone who may not cherish them as I do. They could even be given away, destroyed, or stolen long before then.

Put your faith in Jesus, not in things, not in the world.

Granted, this isn't a call to ignore our possessions. We are supposed to be good stewards of things. It's ok to value things so long as we value them in the perspective of them being gifts from God; things He effectively loans us, gives to us to live our lives or serve Him well. If you go through life thinking everything is disposable, or that there will always be more, you aren't being a good steward.

Yet, at the end of that thinking, we're back to the reminder that we are to put our faith in Jesus, not in things. 'Take this world and give me Jesus' and we'll be just fine.

My Concordia says that archaeological evidence shows the ancient Edomites hid their valuables in rocks, in the deserts. It's sort of like putting your money in a mattress. Yet even in those hidden places, plenty of it must have been looted. They had known Esau, and Jacob, meaning they had personally known God's chosen people. Yet they forgot him – and Him – and over time lost their identity. Is it any wonder the same thing could happen to us?

For further reading: Obadiah 7

Lord Jesus, remind me to put all my treasures in You, that You are my only real valuable.

Practical Proverbial, from Obadiah, 13 January 2021 Today's topic: An Undetected New Beginning

All your allies will force you to the border; your friends will deceive and overpower you; those who eat your bread will set a trap for you, but you will not detect it. Obadiah 7 (NIV).

Have you ever been abandoned by your friends, even your family? I have. Years ago, I did things that were wrong and, when my friends and family learned of it, many of them shunned me. Walked away. Expressed their anger and disgust. At the time, it seemed like an cruel trap, but it wasn't. In reality, it was understandable.

And then there's the social media purge of 2021. I'm one of those whose social media uses have drastically changed in the last week. It has affected how I shared this blog, whose daily recipient list has shrunk from over 10000 down to just over 3000: all because the tech companies have shut down or purged addresses and programs who disagree with them. I naively thought that would never happen, that those companies were fair and honest. I was wrong.

Now, a cold truth: that really doesn't matter much in the long game. God will spread His words however He wants, even these here, and nothing can stop that. Nothing. Love prevails. God wins.

It's true because God is all-powerful, more powerful than the forces of evil that He tolerates so that His glory and love may be displayed. Knowing that, it's also true that God can remove His favor from our lives and let our enemies hurt us. Sometimes those we trust most can turn on us, or seem like they are enemies even when they aren't.

When that happens, it feels like the world is spiraling. The hits keep coming, and when they hit it feels sharp. The sharp words cut deeply, and the deepest cuts take a long time to heal.

But be ye of good cheer in this. Remember, we're never really alone. Sometimes God hasn't removed His favor at all even as the devil is attacking at full power. Sometimes, we simply don't realize that Jesus is with us all along, that it is we who turned our backs on Him instead of the other way around. The beauty of that is that, when we come to our senses, we can turn around and find Him there, ready to embrace again. Even when we're ransacked. Even when we feel defeated.

I found that out. Time and repentance healed the wounds. And the hidden blessing about being kicked off media is that "they" soon lose the ability to control you. With an eye set on God, that makes for an undetected new beginning.

For further reading: Jeremiah 30:14, Psalm 41:9, Obadiah 8

Lord Jesus, forgive me for my sins. Help those I've hurt, and forgive those who've hurt me. Always be my only guide.

Practical Proverbial, from Obadiah, 14 January 2021 Today's topic: More Godder Than God

"In that day," declares the Lord, "will I not destroy the wise men of Edom, those of understanding in the mountains of Esau?" Obadiah 8 (NIV).

God can easily thwart the intelligence, the knowledge, the pride, and any achievement by mankind. If you noodle that thought enough, I think you'll find it was one of the factors the serpent of Eden had in mind when he tempted Eve and Adam to betray God. Denying the simple idolatry of thinking "I know better than you, Lord" means denying the undeniable knowledge that God can thwart either the simplest or most complex thoughts and things that any person can produce.

Another way of saying that might be, "He's God and I'm 'Godder'."

That never works out well. It doesn't because we have to acknowledge this has always been so. And it will be so at the end of time. In Obadiah 8, God foretells of the day when He will overthrow Edom. Granted, that already happened once; many centuries ago, in fact. Yet any honest reading of this verse must remember that God is also foretelling of the day when He will overthrow ALL sin. That's a two-step process. Step one was accomplished the minute Jesus opened His eyes in the garden tomb.

Step two is still in progress. It'll be completed when Jesus returns. He will overthrow evil for the last time. On that day, even the craftiest among us won't be able to talk their way out. Even the bravest and most foolhardy will feel compelled to kneel. Even the most rebellious will be silenced by the perfection of Him. Even the worst of sinners will be judged with the best people ever. Pope, prince, and pauper will all stand equal before the King of Kings, who knows what we believe deep inside.

After that, those who put their hearts in Jesus will live on with His blessings. Those who didn't? It won't be pleasant. They'll live, but without the blessings of love, hope, or peace. It'll burn worse than they could ever imagine, and that'll be an awful way to spend eternity. Let's hope Jesus has a way around it that He didn't tell us. And if He doesn't, then let's hope they – and we – came to their senses before.

Because, to reiterate once more, we are each an Edomite. We are each high and proud and think ourselves better than God. More "Godder," than Him, if you will. The apostle Paul called himself "chief of sinners" so that we might each realize we're no better. We deserve the fate of Edom: to be desolated and forgotten for all time. Knowing that, let's not waste another day.

For further reading: Job 5:12, Isaiah 29:14, Obadiah 9

Forgiving Lord Jesus, I'm a sinner. I've thought, said, and done terrible things. Forgive me. I need You. Only You can forgive.

Practical Proverbial, from Obadiah, 18 January 2021 Today's topic: Defeating Teman

Your warriors, Teman, will be terrified, and everyone in Esau's mountains will be cut down in the slaughter. Obadiah 9 (NIV).

At the end of all time, the greatest military ever will be incapable of firing back at the Lord. When Jesus returns, all the assembled weapons of the most highly trained armies on the earth will be powerless against the quietest words of Jesus on His white horse of triumph. When the King of Kings returns to end the order of sin, the defenders of sin will already have been defeated even as they won't have a clue about it.

In our time, the most powerful military on the planet is that of my beloved United States. No force on earth has overcome it; with nuclear deterrence, conventional firepower, technological edge, and continuous training, even in a time when the incoming government promises to slash the Department of Defense, the United States military is still considered to be the most powerful anywhere. I am prouder than I can say (and maybe than I should be) to call myself a veteran of this immense brotherhood.

And, without parallel, the most agile and ready-for-anything force in any military must certainly be that of the Israeli Defense Forces. Undeclared since 1947 and ready at a moment's notice to overcome any aggression by any threat, the IDF is considered to be the best of the best. The larger and more powerful militaries of hostile nations around Israel are consistently leery of provoking Israel and for good reason.

I congratulate every other military on the planet for being chosen as a runner-up in this highly subjective assessment.

Yet (if there is a United States at the end of time) if you pair up the US military and the IDF, both would be defeated by a word from the mouth of Jesus when He returns. It won't be close, and it won't even be anything new.

Edom was powerful in the time of Obadiah. It had been a mighty nation since the days of its founding father, Esau. According to Wikipedia, the Teman clan was the dominant Edomite clan in the lands south and east of Israel (in present day Jordan and Saudi Arabia). And, according to Obadiah, the Lord vowed to destroy it because Teman/Edom had forsaken Him when Israel was taken into captivity.

Given that many US forces still guard Saudi Arabia, it would be like God defeating the US military. For the sake of honoring God, one would hope our forces never come to that. Yet, if that is what God wills for the end of time, it will happen without effort. God cannot be defeated.

For further reading: Psalm 137:7, Ezekiel 25:12-14, Joel 3:19, Amos 1:11-12, Obadiah 10

Lord God, thank You for humbling even our mighty armies of the world. Let it be as You will.

Practical Proverbial, from Obadiah, 19 January 2021 Today's topic: Our Leader Forgives

Because of the violence against your brother Jacob, you will be covered with shame; you will be destroyed forever. Obadiah 10 (NIV).

Esau forgave Jacob. Jacob had wronged Esau by taking Esau's birthright (which Esau had, until then, held in very low regard). So Jacob fled and lived in trepidation of his older twin until the time when God led him back home. On his way there, Jacob and Esau were reunited in tears of forgiveness. Esau's descendants, however, are another story.

Sort of like our political factions today, aren't they? One group leaves leadership tomorrow; another returns. Will the incoming side use its recovered power to seek vengeance against its opponents? Will the outgoing hold a grudge? Will God still bless us?

Esau's descendants did, and they paid a terrible price for it. Edom, their nation, held what is, today, the southern Levant (south Israel and south Jordan). And because they were on a trade route between Asia and Africa (Egypt), Edom as a nation dissipated over the centuries after assisting in the overthrow of Israel. Some say that the Idumeans, mentioned by church father, Jerome, were the descendants of Esau and Edom. The Idumeans disappeared early in the first millennium of Christianity after their last 'great' (and ruthless) leader – Herod the Great – died and his descendants faded from history.

It's almost as if God punished those who had revolted against His chosen people, and who had, personally, revolted against Him when He finally appeared as the Christ child. Is it any stretch of the imagination to think that the same fate couldn't befall us?

It's a shame, you know, that things turned out that way. After all, as we mentioned, Esau forgave Jacob. Perhaps he came to realize how shabbily he had taken for granted God's promise to bless the descendants of Abraham and Isaac. Perhaps he foresaw the violence that could result from generational grudges. Perhaps he missed his family. Either way, when Jacob returned from Laban, he dreaded meeting his older brother, who had sworn to kill him.

Yet that didn't happen. Instead, Esau met Jacob on the journey and they wept in happiness. Forgiveness matters so much more than resentment.

How terrible it is when a people forget their history, forget that it is God who forgives us first so that we might learn to forgive each other. How much more terrible it would be for us, or any people, if God removed His hand of favor from our lives? As we stand on this day when transition is in motion, let's remember who our true victor – and leader – is, and what happens to those who forsake Him.

For further reading: Genesis 27, Genesis 32-33, Obadiah 11

Lord Jesus, forgive our arrogance, forgive our sins. Teach us to forgive each other, to bear with each other in burdens; to learn from the past.

Practical Proverbial, from Obadiah, 20 January 2021 Today's topic: The Fate of Edom

On the day you stood aloof while strangers carried off his wealth and foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem, you were like one of them. Obadiah 11 (NIV).

One of the things that God is telling us in this verse is that we can't stand by while others cause harm without becoming like those causing the harm.

MLK Day was this week, and we celebrate Martin Luther King every January because he stood up to change things. He refused to stand by any longer while his fellow citizens were denied their God-given rights just because they were black. King became a modern-day hero for this and justifiably so.

And today is Inauguration Day. No matter how we arrived at this point, today a new president will be sworn into office. Will you stand by while harm is caused (by anyone) in the days to come? Will you stand by if the newer people persecute the former, as many have promised? Will you be silent?

MLK didn't do that. Many in our world today don't do that (and our voices are being silenced for it).

Neither did the founders of our country. Neither did Nicodemus or Joseph of Arimathea: members of the Jewish ruling council who objected to railroading Jesus to crucify Him. Neither do other people of honor, valor, and faith.

God waited generations to bring Edom to task, reminding them through men like Obadiah that He and He alone would hold them responsible for betraying Him. Edom cooperated with the attacking Babylonians in destroying Israel and hauling them away to captivity. They betrayed their blood relatives, the Israelites, in a grudge going back centuries. Yet after only a few years more, God kept His promise and dispersed Edom to the winds. After the last of the Idumeans died out, the line of Esau was no more even as God's lesson of fidelity remained. The Edomites were judged and found guilty.

Sort of like traitors. Sort of like Judas Iscariot. Sort of like Benedict Arnold. Sort of like us if we stand idle and don't at least speak up to defend others when wrong is done to them.

God asks us to remain faithful to His Word. To put our faith in Him alone; to repent and turn from our sins; to forgive and love as He loved; to not seek vengeance even when we are wronged. Those are words we need to hear again in our world, especially today. Martin Luther King understood them. Many in our country try to. Let's hope the incoming officeholders do as well. The fate of Edom awaits all of us if they don't.

For further reading: Job 6:27, Ezekiel 24:6, Amos 1:6, Obadiah 12

Lord, forgive us our sins. I believe in You and You alone. Help me when I fail, and grant wisdom to our leaders.

Practical Proverbial, from Obadiah, 21 January 2021 Today's topic: The Greatest Inauguration Address

You should not gloat over your brother in the day of his misfortune, nor rejoice over the people of Judah in the day of their destruction, nor boast so much in the day of their trouble. Obadiah 12 (NIV).

The greatest inauguration address in American history was not given by Joe Biden yesterday, nor was it given by former President Trump four years ago (though that was a pretty good speech).

No, the greatest inaugural address was given by Abraham Lincoln on March 4, 1865. He gave it at the start of his second term: a term that would end with his assassination only 41 days later. Lincoln gave the speech knowing that the armies of the Confederacy were nearly defeated, that the Confederacy itself was nearly bankrupt and starving, and that the end of the Civil War was fast approaching. The outcome of the contentious election had been uncertain even up until Election Day but he had overwhelmingly prevailed with the support of military votes. Advisors and generals were urging Lincoln to give a rousing victory speech, one that emphasized triumph over evil slavery.

Over 600,000 Americans, Northern and Southern, had died in the war. Every family in the country was affected; nearly every family had a soldier or knew a soldier who had fought, been wounded, or killed (including Lincoln's). The cataclysm was begun on the precept of preserving Constitutional rights (but concerned slavery in nearly all its underlying causes). It was ending only after unspeakable bloodshed that had literally torn the nation in two. Thus, it made sense that President Lincoln would give a speech that gloated or bragged victory for the principles so many victorious Union soldiers had fought for.

Yet Lincoln gave a speech that briefly summarized what had transpired, then asked his fellow countrymen to have mercy on their disaffected Rebel brethren. Lincoln sensed it would be wrong, even sinful, to gloat over the misfortunes that war had brought on the defeated South. "With malice toward none," he asked the nation to bind up its wounds, to care for each other, to make and cherish "a just and lasting peace." He spoke only seven minutes.

Lincoln was channeling Moses. And Jesus. Like Obadiah, President Lincoln reminded his audience – and us – that woe would come to anyone who gloats over a defeated foe. We, too, are sinful. Even when righteously vanquishing evil, we are not to enjoy it nor celebrate the humiliation of our brothers. To do so is to celebrate humiliating God. To do so violates God's declaration that we, His creation, are very good.

I doubt any president in our lifetime, even this new one, could speak so meaningfully.

For further reading: Genesis 3:19, Job 31:29, Proverbs 24:17, Ezekiel 35:15, Mathew 7:1, Luke 17:1, Obadiah 13

Lord Jesus, always remind me to not gloat over the defeated but, instead, to show them Your mercy.

Practical Proverbial, from Obadiah, 25 January 2021 Today's topic: Football and Faith

You should not march through the gates of my people in the day of their disaster, nor gloat over them in their calamity in the day of their disaster, nor seize their wealth in the day of their disaster. Obadiah 13 (NIV).

Continuing on the theme of verse 12 – you shouldn't gloat over your defeated opponent – there is yesterday in football. I like football. Sometimes, it's a microcosm of life. The NFC game between the Packers and Buccaneers was a nail-biter. Evenly matched teams; evenly matched defense; team leaders familiar with the cold; team leaders with, between them, nearly 3 decades of experience, including winning Super Bowls.

In the first game, there were very few penalties for unsportsmanlike conduct. It was a championship game, so woe to the player who got too big for his britches when the stakes are so high. And, at the end of the game, even though the traveling team beat the favored home team, the victorious Buccaneers didn't gloat about it. They celebrated, and that's appropriate. Indeed, for the conference champions, the NFL always has a field celebration at the end of the game. But there wasn't any gloating or grandstanding or dancing on the defeat of the opponent.

In the second game, however, especially in the last quarter, there was plenty of poor conduct; lots of penalties; unsportsmanlike careless stupidity. Yet, when it was all over, the victorious Chiefs didn't dance on the grave of the defeated. Raw nerves hurt, but character can salve that pain.

Indeed, that's what God decrees for us. We can celebrate victory, and we should. Hard-won battles are worth remembering, especially to give God the glory in the victory. Yet the Lord tells us to stop the victory dance there.

Think Grant at Appomattox. General Grant could have humiliated the Army of Northern Virginia. Instead, he sought healing and mercy for a brave enemy. Think November 11th on the Western Front, where men came out of their trenches to cordially meet their enemies in no-man's land. Think Europe after World War II, where Secretary (and General) Marshall convinced the American government to rebuild vanquished Germany lest it fall into the hands of communists bent on more evil.

Think of Obadiah's words.

God commands us to oppose His enemies, to fight on His side, to surrender ourselves to Him so that He might wage justice through us. Yet, when the battle is won, instead of the old ways of humiliating those we defeat, we are to offer them restoration into the family of man. It is true in faith. It is true in family and friendship. It's true at church and in politics (or should be), and it is true in war.

By the way, Go Bucs!

For further reading: Ezekiel 35:5, Obadiah 14

Lord, teach me today to have mercy on my foes, to forgive generously and model Your justice.

Practical Proverbial, from Obadiah, 26 January 2021 Today's topic: Our Personal Marshall Plans

You should not wait at the crossroads to cut down their fugitives, nor hand over their survivors in the day of their trouble. Obadiah 14 (NIV).

The Concordia Study Bible reference for this verse is from 1 Kings. It takes place during the life of Elijah, the great prophet. 1 Kings 18:4 outlines a different Obadiah (but still a follower of the Lord) as he hides a hundred of the Lord's prophets from murder-bent queen Jezebel. Obadiah then meets Elijah, who is about to confront the prophets of Baal, discredit them, kill them, and threaten the rule of Ahab and Jezebel.

Yet, in Obadiah 14, the (later) prophet cautions that we, as believers, are not to lie in wait for our enemy. We aren't to destroy him, or those of his family, tribe, group, or nation when they are down and out. We are to show mercy where we can. How can we reconcile these commands?

If you recall from the last blog, we discussed the Marshall Plan. If you aren't familiar with it, it was a massive loan program from the United States to European nations after World War II. The war had wrought untold devastation on central Europe, so much that defeated Germany was in very real danger of starvation. Without immediate rescue, the nascent alliance of western nations would be enslaved into the communist bloc. Already, the Cold War between the US and Soviet Union was well underway. If Germany fell to the Soviets, none of the other nations in Europe would last long.

Secretary of State George Marshall spearheaded the program to aid in economic rebuilding of the former Axis powers, inculcating in them both western democracy and free market economics. Within four years, Europe began to recover and the economies of even former enemies had stabilized, preserving economic, political, and religious freedoms against the very real evil of communism.

We could have turned away. It wasn't our fight anymore; we, with our Allies, had already won, and at devastating personal cost. We could have turned over our hundred prophets to the Jezebel of Moscow and let them receive their own fate. We could have simply gone home...or gone back to war, only this time with the Soviets.

Instead, the humane thing to do, and in the interest of self-preservation, was to implement the Marshall Plan and save all those people. To give them a chance at living – and believing – on their own. We preserved the best of our Allies and readied them to stand on their own again.

Tell me: how will you do this in your own life today? How will you preserve even an enemy, or help a needy friend? What can you do to help someone beat back the threat of evil today?

For further reading: 1 Kings 18:4, Obadiah 15

Lord, help me to help someone else today.

Practical Proverbial, from Obadiah, 27 January 2021 Today's topic: A Forgiven Bad Thing

The day of the Lord is near for all nations. As you have done, it will be done to you; your deeds will return upon your own head. Obadiah 15 (NIV).

So, I did a bad thing last night. Just before writing the words of this blog post, I cussed out a woman in a parking lot. I was driving around the local Kroger building, killing time while my wife was buying something inside. I drove up behind a woman, who was parked in the middle of the traffic lane, apparently waiting for someone in the nearby dance studio.

I waited behind her for a few moments. When she didn't move, I flicked my lights at her car, then waited again. When she didn't move after that, I honked my horn, and received a rather annoyed look from the man with whom the woman in the car was talking; I gather he was another waiting dance parent. Finally, I rolled down my window and yelled "I can't get around you," to which she yelled "too bad. Try anyway."

So, I did. On my way around her, I believe I had only 1-2 inches between my car and hers and the other cars in the lot. She was smirking at me, and I rolled down my window to call her a, well, uncomplimentary name. She let me know I was number one, and I drove away.

Now, I won't speak for her; I can only speak for myself. Knowing that, I hope the world doesn't end right now because, if I was unrepentant about what I said, I'd be one of the people who should dread the day of the Lord. My words (and deeds) deserve damnation. They were unkind and uncalled for, even if the other person was being equally uncharitable or worse.

That's the way it is with sin. Even the smallest of my sins separates me from God (just like yours do you). Left to our own devices, we deserve an eternity in hell for even the smallest of rebellions. Envy your neighbor's new car: damnation. Capital murder: damnation. Cheating on your taxes (or your expense report, or your spouse, or on a bet, or the speed limit): damnation. Fibbing to your kids: damnation. You get the drift.

Without Jesus, we're damned. Obadiah prophesied it, and so did all the other prophets. That's why they pointed to God Himself delivering us through the man Jesus, whom they didn't even know yet. Without Jesus, even tiny sin damns us to hell. With Jesus, it's all forgiven.

I forgive the stranger in the parking lot. If I see her again, I'll ask for hers.

For further reading: Jeremiah 46:10, Ezekiel 30:3, Joel 2:31, Amos 5:18, Obadiah 16

Lord, please forgive me for my stupid words and actions. They're sins. And bless the people I've wronged.

Practical Proverbial, from Obadiah, 28 January 2021 Today's topic: Sinful Things

Just as you drank on my holy hill, so all the nations will drink continually; they will drink and drink and be as if they had never been. Obadiah 16 (NIV).

This is a warning against drunkenness and, in turn, all sin.

When the Babylonians overran Jerusalem, they had the assistance of the Edomites, the descendants of Esau; we've discussed this before. Like many ancient kingdoms (or many current nations), the Edomites celebrated by getting drunk, specifically getting drunk on Mount Zion, where the Lord's Temple stood. The invaders desecrated the Temple, and insulted God by doing unholy things in a consecrated holy place: unholy things like getting drunk in the holy rooms where God resided.

Flash forward to today. I can't speak for you, but I've been drunk before. Many times, in fact. These days, I can't say I'm proud of it. I can't say I've ever gotten drunk in a church, but I've done it plenty of other places. And I'm ashamed to admit I'm not a nice guy when I've had too much. In fact, sometimes I'm a jerk.

Here's the kicker: pick your poison: your sin and mine are both detestable to God. They are all equally wrong. Those who don't embrace the forgiveness of Jesus to turn from them are damned for choosing the consequences of sin. It was sin for the Babylonians to desecrate the Temple. It was sin for me to drink so much so often. It was sin for that woman to mouth off to me in the parking lot the other day (and for me to return fire in kind). It was sin for those people to invade the US Capitol (and for all who overreacted after it). It's sin for us to judge others.

Sinful things, done by me, done by you, done by all of us.

The good news is the news you already know and we need to always remember. Jesus paid for all those sins. All of them. Every sin going back to Eve believing the serpent is paid for in every way possible by Jesus' sacrifice on Calvary. Every spiritual death owed for every sin is extinguished by His resurrection in that garden. Nothing you or I could ever do could change that, or add to it, or take away from it. The ONLY thing we bring into the 'salvation equation' is our acceptance of it: everything to actually save us the God-man Jesus already did.

I'll drink to celebrate that...just not too much.

For further reading: Obadiah 17

Lord Jesus, only You forgive sin and only you have eternal life for us.

Practical Proverbial, from Obadiah, 1 February 2021 Today's topic: Clearly About Jesus

But on Mount Zion will be deliverance; it will be holy, and Jacob will possess his inheritance. Jacob will be a fire and Joseph a flame; Esau will be stubble, and they will set him on fire and destroy him. There will be no survivors from Esau." The Lord has spoken. Obadiah 17-18 (NIV).

This is a prophecy about Jesus who was, is, and is to come. Because Obadiah was written hundreds of years before the Earthly life of Jesus, it was about Jesus yet to come. Jesus hadn't yet lived here as a man, so Obadiah's words were clearly about the time of the common era anno domini.

And they were also clearly about the time after that, the time when, after the life of Christ, the last known remnants of Esau's lineage would be extinguished. After the Herods died out and the Idumeans were no more, there would be no more survivors from Esau. The verses are clearly about this.

Last, they are clearly about the time when Jesus will clearly return. He promised that He would return, and all 300+ prophecies about Jesus of Nazareth being the Christ came true, were fulfilled only in Him. Knowing that everything He said about Himself was true, we have every reason to believe, to KNOW, that He will return. That, when He returns, God's chosen people – those who believe in Jesus the Christ – will possess His inheritance. God's original and subsequent promises will both be renewed. Those who mocked Him by mocking His people will be made subject to His justice.

Until then, we get to learn from what has happened so we may live lives in anticipation of what's ahead. We can choose to live in trepidation and dread of it, or we can choose to live in constant celebration of Him who gives eternal life to all who believe in Him. Those who reject Him will ultimately live in constant regret of that choice; wouldn't it be better, then, for us to live lives that share Jesus' promise instead of focusing on what so many people dread?

In church yesterday (at Grace Bible Church Creekside, in College Station), the minister touched on that very subject. Wouldn't it be a deeper praise to our God for us to live our lives in ways that help others want to know more about Him? Yes, the end is going to come one day, whether it's 10 minutes or 10000 years from now. Shouldn't we use our today's to help others join in the celebration? It's why Obadiah wrote what he did.

For further reading: Psalm 69:35, Isaiah 14:1-2, Joel 2:23, Zechariah 8:12, Zechariah 12:6, Obadiah 19

Lord Jesus, teach me ways today to share You for other people so that they may know You, too.

Practical Proverbial, from Obadiah, 2 February 2021 Today's topic: Bless So Many Others

People from the Negev will occupy the mountains of Esau, and people from the foothills will possess the land of the Philistines. They will occupy the fields of Ephraim and Samaria, and Benjamin will possess Gilead. Obadiah 19 (NIV).

This verse harkens back to God's original promise to Jacob/Israel about the land he and his descendants would inherit. God had kept that promise, hundreds of years later, when He delivered Israel (the nation) from Egypt. Centuries later, under David, the entire land was unified under one ruler who submitted himself to the Lord. Of course, sin took root and the kingdom soon split. In time, one kingdom disappeared altogether. The other was taken captive by Babylon. That kingdom would return to its homeland but also eventually dissipate.

Kind of a downer, right? Only if you stop there. Instead, how about we think bigger, think longer-term. Instead of simply saying, "well that's nice to know," how about we remember that God did improbable things in the lives of ancient Israelites, and He's doing wonderful, improbable things in our lives, too.

Right. People are dying of cancer, AIDS, and covid. There has never been true peace in the land of Jacob, even from his day thousands of years ago. Our divisive politics have some in America talking civil war. Those who break the law seem, more and more, to get away with it in a two-tiered system of no justice. Millions are unemployed while both big business and big government thrive. And God is doing wonderful things in our lives? Get a grip.

Grip on this: He is. Jesus is every bit as active in your life today as He was in Billy Graham's, or John Paul II's, or Jacob's, Mother Theresa's, or Moses'. All those leaders: they were ordinary people. God did extraordinary things through them and their use of the talents He gave them. They didn't have any supernatural powers or abilities, but they did have a relationship with Him. Because of that, Jesus was able to work His Kingdom work through their lives and bless so many others.

Like them, every morning we get to wake up to a new day. Good or bad, improbable things can happen today, and can happen because of what we say or do. In my opinion, big things happen in the world because ordinary people like us live our God-given lives, not because of politicians, business titans, or media influences. The world moves because Jesus moves through us and, as He does, He moves mountains. He fights diseases, and hopelessness, and raw emotions. He does it through us so that His promises of old may bless us all in the world we know today.

For further reading: Numbers 1:36, Isaiah 11:14, Jeremiah 31:5, Obadiah 20

Lord Jesus, praise and blessing to You for living through us, for doing great things in our world today.

Practical Proverbial, from Obadiah, 3 February 2021 Today's topic: Exiles

This company of Israelite exiles who are in Canaan will possess the land as far as Zarephath; the exiles from Jerusalem who are in Sepharad will possess the towns of the Negev. Obadiah 20 (NIV).

The exiles: that's us.

Sure, Obadiah's prophecy directly referred to the Jews who had been taken captive in Babylon. God would return them to their Promised Land and they would, once again, live in that land of milk and honey. That region extended from (today's) desert east of Jerusalem all the way up into present day Lebanon. Indirectly, the verse also refers to the two-millennium Jewish diaspora that has only been resolved in our time by the nation of Israel moving back to that same homeland that God promised to Abraham thousands of years ago.

Yet you and I are also exiles. We are cast out to live in a world that, like that of Abraham and Lot, is degenerating and immoral. We are sent, by Jesus, to be His witnesses to the ends of the Earth, in lands both familiar and strange. That sets us apart because, even in this so-called modern world, most of the 7.5 billion people here live within 100 miles of their birthplace. People who read this blog reside on five different continents and in dozens of Christian denominations, and most have moved to be where they are.

But this is us, assigned by the Lord to live lives on the go, sometimes far away from our homes and always far from the perfection of heaven. Through it, God still promises we will inherit a land where He will live with us, where He will walk with us again daily as He used to walk with Adam. To keep that promise, God came to us in His Son, Jesus, who is both fully God and fully man, and who lived a perfect life so that He might offer that life as the perfect sacrifice. That He might renew what was corrupted. And, brother do we need it...

...Because that degenerating, immoral world? We're not just in it: we're part of it. Our sins, large or small, separate us from God and exile us here. But it won't be that way forever, and for most of forever, it will be our remade home. When Jesus returns to make all things new, we will return from our exile in this world of sin to live with Him in a world made perfect again. Eden will be returned and we will be able to live in harmony with the Lord and each other.

Until then, we're exiled here.

For further reading: 1 Kings 17:9-10, Jeremiah 33:13, Luke 4:26, Obadiah 21

Lord Jesus, as I live in exile from You here, be my strength, my guide, and my Lord. Guide all my words and actions.

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Practical Proverbial, from Obadiah, 4 February 2021 Today's topic: Lord of Zion

Deliverers will go up on Mount Zion to govern the mountains of Esau. And the kingdom will be the Lord's. Obadiah 21 (NIV).

This last verse of Obadiah is a prophecy of the Christ. It is a prophecy that has been both fulfilled and is awaiting fulfillment. In verse 21, the deliverer is the Lord Jesus Himself, who spent much of His earthly life in the Temple, which was built on Mount Zion in Jerusalem. He delivered His people out of Babylonian exile back to their home. That plays into how the verse is awaiting fulfillment in Jesus' Kingdom-yet-to-come. We separate ourselves from Him through sin; we're back in exile. When Jesus returns, everything – us, land, everything – will be under His realm as He makes the world the new Zion.

Think about that a little and maybe you'll see the fruitlessness of sinful rebellion. The more I think about it, the more I think that all sin is just a variation of idolatry. All sin is simply what results when we put ourselves in God's place, thinking we're better than Him. It's as old as mankind itself, because that was mankind's original sin. Indeed, it was the original sin of Lucifer, who was cast out of heaven for wanting to be God. Idolatry and the pride-child born of it were the worst sins of Esau. Idolatry fly-papers itself onto every one of our sins as well.

And Jesus vanquished sin, restoring the balance relationship between ourselves and God. He conquered death: the outcome of sin. He removed the barrier that our sins put between Him and us, making it possible for each of us to stand before God guiltless once again. White lies? Paid for. Murder one? Paid for. Cheating, lying, porn addiction, and watching Bridgerton? All paid for.

Paid in full so that we can stand on Zion with Him unafraid. We who exiled ourselves away from Him by our sinful choices will return home because "home" will be wherever He is. Search inside yourself and, if you believe in Jesus, you already know this to be true. Indeed, when Obadiah prophesies here about the Jesus, who he didn't even know yet, he's prophesying about our destiny as well. We're a part of His eternity now because He saved us. We did nothing to earn it, but He did it anyway. When Jesus returns, everyone (even the unrepentant) will know that He who stands atop Zion is the Lord and Savior of all. So repent, now, and enjoy being saved.

And so ends the tiny book of Obadiah. Next, we move to the story of an angry man, a fish, and what God teaches us through them.

For further reading: Judges 3:9, Psalm 22:28, Malachi 1:14. Revelation 11:15, Jonah 1:1

Bless, O Lord, the words of Obadiah so that they may be a blessing to others who read them.