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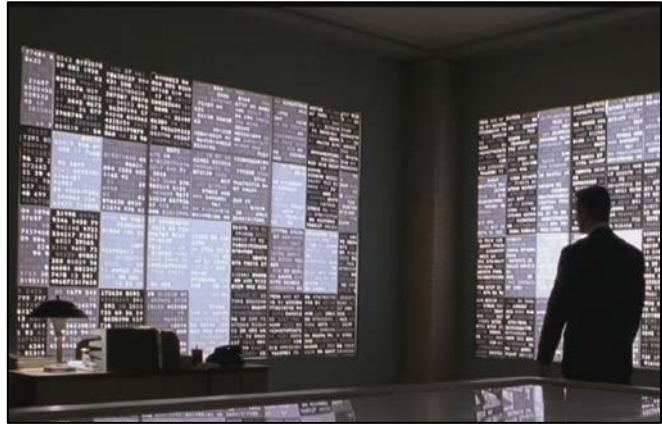
MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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Caveats and Consolations in the Face of
Persecution, Part 1

In 1998, Silvia Nassar wrote *A Beautiful Mind* which introduced to the very real struggle called schizophrenia of Princeton Nobel Laureate in economics, Dr. John Nash.¹ At one point in his career Dr. Nash was invited by the Pentagon to work on a highly classified project deciphering encrypted telecommunications. Amazingly he could look at a wall of information and immediately see links and correlations which the average mind would never see.



As one continues to read his story, one discovers that Dr. Nash's world came tumbling down; for none of this was real. Dr. Nash literally attended meetings in what he considered to be a classified building. In reality, it was a dilapidated facility where he spent countless hours by himself!

If you watched the movie, or read the book, you probably had the same reaction as did I: *How strange it would be to live in a world which in part was not real.*

And yet family of God, none of us are immune from doing this. For you see, there is a sickness that is attached to all of us which, when NOT dormant, results in literal delusion. It is called pride! We find this in the first address that God gave His people as it related to the Edomites and their destruction. I've titled it, An Exposé of Pride.

The year was 586 BC and the Southern Kingdom of Judah had just fallen to the Babylonians. The nation was destroyed, the temple burnt, and God's people viciously murdered, abused, and now enslaved in Babylon! And yet rather than helping their brothers and sisters in their hour of need, the Edomites taunted them, verbally abused them, and eventually participated in the destruction of Jerusalem! With their cruel words and actions fresh in his memory, Obadiah penned this prophecy to His people on account of the Edomites!

For the sake of emphasis, Obadiah utilized a chiasmic structure where the first and last lines are parallel such that the emphasis is on the middle.

V. 2: God will Make Edom Small

VV. 3-4a: The Cause and Consequence of Pride

V. 4b: God will Bring Edom Down

We are going to begin looking at the middle section (vv. 3-4a) and then end with the outside section, vv. 2 & 4b. Notice the first thing God would have us know about pride, is that at its core, it is a form of atheism.

Obadiah 3, "The arrogance of your heart has deceived you..."

As you might guess, there are a variety of words for “pride”/“arrogance” in the Bible. The one used here, זָדוֹן (*zādôn*), is found forty times in the Old Testament. It literally is used of *boiling* liquid as in Genesis.

Genesis 25:29, “And when Jacob had cooked stew [that is, ‘boiled it’], Esau came in from the field and he was famished.”

The word for ‘cooked’ here is the word used in our passage for “pride.” It literally referred to “boiling” stew which came to reflect perfectly the course of pride in a person’s life- it boils out of them. In this regard, it is rather significant that Obadiah chose this word to use here of Edom’s pride. As Esau’s original undoing was on account זָדוֹן (*zādôn*) (*boiled* stew), it would remain the source of his offspring’s undoing- translated here, is “arrogance” or “pride.”

The basic idea behind this word is an exaggerated sense of self-importance. It involves a bringing of God down below man and the raising up of man above God; in this manner we see that it is a form of atheism! In fact, the word involves a progression. Consider that it begins with presumed authority. Moses speaking of the false prophet writes:

Deuteronomy 18:20, “But the prophet who shall speak a word presumptuously [arrogantly- that is our word] in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he shall speak in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.”

The false prophet was one who *presumed* to speak in the name of God, assuming an authority that God had not given!² That’s the beginning of pride. The proud individual makes assumptions about God, His will, or His kingdom- like these:

- Being timely is more important than the peace of my household.
- Speaking my mind is more important than the well-being of those in my presence.
- Doing and being right is one of our highest calls.

Now nowhere in Scripture can any of these statements be supported. In fact, we have multiple passages to the contrary!³ Yet that does not stop the proud individual from presuming that their moral strength is God’s greatest pleasure! And so, it begins with presumed authority. It then ends with a willful rebellion! After God rebuked the nation for siding with the ten spies, the next morning Israel went out in force to ‘take the Promised Land’! Yet God had already sent them into the wilderness... which meant any other action on the part of the nation at this point would be rebellion. The Israelites, failing to see this, the next morning poised themselves for battle believing that such devotion undoubtedly would impress God such that the Lord would change His mind! Notice God’s response:

Deuteronomy 1:43, “So I spoke to you, but you would not listen. Instead you rebelled against the command of the Lord, and acted presumptuously [our word] and went up

into the hill country [to fight].”

This is the natural course of pride. It presumes its good intentions are so pleasing to God that any resulting sin is of little or no consequence. Yes, God did send His people back into the wilderness, yet their willingness now to die for the Lord in their mind trumped the command! This is how pride operates! To use the examples, I just gave:

- The proud person who thinks being on time is most important will openly criticize those who are perennially late. And when confronted with their rudeness, they will dismiss it as being minor in comparison to the greater issue at hand!
- The proud person who thinks doing and being right is most important, easily justifies degrading those who do wrong. How can they live with themselves? Because though their criticism may be sin, it is minor in comparison to that which they are criticizing!

Pride leads the sinner to categorizing sin, viewing their perceived strength⁴ as more important than any “collateral sin” that may come as a result! Accordingly, the proud person willingly participates in “minor” sin because they believe their moral superiority justifies it! This is what David had in mind when he prayed.

Psalms 19:13b, “...keep back Thy servant from presumptuous *sins*...”

That is, sin that is committed as a result of arrogance. Combined we have here the essence of pride. It is the willful exaltation of self above God which assumes prerogatives which God has not given. The end is rebellion against God which is believed by the participant to be acceptable and even commendable by the Lord.⁵

From all this I hope you see that Pride is a Form of Atheism by which the sinner lifts himself above God, His authority, and His word, and so engages in selective obedience viewing any and all resulting sin as collateral damage which God most certainly will overlook! In this way, God becomes subservient to the proud man’s will.

Secondly pride flourishes in self-deception.

Obadiah 3b, “The arrogance of your heart has deceived you...”

: נִשְׁבָּר (nāšā); this is an interesting word which involves an element of delusion. For example,

Psalms 55:15 references “...death coming upon someone deceitfully...”. This is speaking of the non-Christian who *WELCOMES* death. They think it is a gateway to paradise. Yet in reality, death will usher them into an existence where they will spend eternity suffering under the wrath of God! And yet, “they welcome it!?” That is the height of self-deception!

It is this self-deception that is part and parcel of pride. The proud person -- like the one

struggling with schizophrenia -- does not live completely in the real world, but one of his own making. The most well-known example of this is found when Eve responded to God's inquiry as to what she had done.

Genesis 3:13b, "And the woman said, 'The serpent deceived me, and I ate.'"

Eve allowed herself to be deceived! Prior to eating of the tree of the knowledge of God and evil, Eve actually believed that in rebelling against God, she would be free of God's authority and so gain the freedom to live as a god in this world, doing whatever she wanted (cf. Genesis 3:1-6). It is this self-deception that is the fruit of pride! In pushing God down and exalting themselves, the descendants of Esau fell into severe delusion thinking themselves to be greater than God! Notice how it worked. It began with the catalyst.

Obadiah 3c, "...you who live in the clefts of the rock⁶ in the loftiness of your dwelling place, who say in your heart, 'Who will bring me down to earth?'"

As we saw last week, the territory where Esau settled after Jacob returned to the Promised Land was that area south east of the Promised Land.

Petra as well as many Petra-like cities dotted Edom! This territory is dotted with large, arid mountains in which massive caves have been dug out of the rock enabling its inhabitants to live quite securely among the eagles! It is here that the Edomites established their kingdom.

The result was that Edom was a formidable Kingdom in the ancient world which could not easily be conquered. This gave them a sense of security which in time became inflated such that their national attitude was, "Who will bring me down to the earth?" The implied answer was, "No one!"



Pride does NOT rise in a vacuum. It takes root in the strength or advantage of an individual which sets them apart from others. Yet on account of our sinful heart, it is this advantage which is a spring board into delusion.



Obadiah 4a, “Though you build high like the eagle, though you set your nest among the stars...”-

The Edomites truly lived where eagles soared. This gave them a sense of “unconquerability” which eventually led them in their thinking to the point where they defied God, “*Even the God of Israel could not defeat us!*” It is similar to what was said about the Titanic! This is what is meant by the reference, “you set your nest among the stars!”⁷

Don’t miss it! While the gods may have lived on Mount Olympus... or Mount Sinai (for that matter)... Edom “dwelt among the stars” (which in that day was understood to be the highest part of creation, Job 22:12; Is. 14:13)! That meant Edom was higher than the gods! Now when it comes to the false gods of this world, that most certainly was the case! But such cannot be said about the one and only true God! Yet that is what Edom in their pride thought when it came to God!

We are going to look at v. 4b in a bit, but for now let me just reference it. The full verse includes a level of irony I don’t want you to miss. Though Edom thought they were higher than God on account of their geography and national history, nevertheless we read this:

Obadiah 4b, ““Though you build high like the eagle, though you set your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down,’ declares the Lord.”

In other words, as high and exalted as Edom may have fancied themselves, God was higher and more exalted! It is reminiscent of The tower of Babel where the text says, “And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built” (Genesis 11:5). As high as the tower was built, God was still higher!⁸ I love the words of D. W. Barker:⁹

In her boast, Edom was looking the wrong way. Being beyond man’s reach, she forgot the incomparable greatness of God. (T.Desmond alexander, 2009, p. 36)

From this we see that pride ultimately leads to self-deception! William Secker wrote this:

There is no proud man who is not a foolish man, and scarcely is there any foolish man who is not a proud man. It is the night-owl of ignorance which broods and hatches the peacock of pride. (Secker, 2012)

I once knew a man who frequently boasted of his ability to manage his finances. He actually told me that "I could call business owners and some of his powerful friends and they would tell me how amazing he was in handling his finances."- that was the language he used! Yet at the time he had over a hundred thousand dollars in consumer debt!! Talk about delusional!

How thoroughly wicked is this thing called pride. It blinds its possessors to reality! This state of sin and misery will undoubtedly bring you in contact with such persons:

- No one can teach as well as they- and yet they cannot teach.
- No one is as loving as they- and yet they are so hurtful.
- No one is as generous- though they are stingy with their resources.
- No one is a upright or holy- yet their lives betray a wicked, unmerciful heart!

When Christ told the disciples that they all would fall away that night and so abandon the Lord, do you remember Peter's response? It is quite shocking and out of place.

Matthew 26:33: "But Peter answered and said to Him, '*Even though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away.*'"

In essence he said, "*No Lord, on this point you are wrong!*" Talk about delusional! In fact, it was in this context that Christ confronted Peter with reality.

Matthew 26:34a, "Jesus said to him, 'Truly I say to you that this *very* night, before a cock crows, you shall deny Me three times.' [You'd think that would have humbled Peter, but it didn't. It just gave way to more delusion...] Peter said to Him, 'Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You.'"

In other words, "*Yay, though You walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will be with you! My rod and staff will comfort you!*" And yet in reality what did it take for Peter to deny Christ? A lowly serving girl and the simple question, "Aren't you one of them?" (cf. Matthew 26:69-75)

Oh Christian! Guard your heart from this sin and frequently pray that God might give you the grace to have an accurate view of yourself.

Romans 12:3, "For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith."

This brings us to the end of pride.

Obadiah 2, “Behold, I will make you small among the nations; you are greatly despised.”

This passage details the two results of pride in the life of a sinner. The first is insignificance.

Obadiah 2a, “I will make you small...”

This is an interesting word in the Hebrew, קָטָן (*qāṭān*). (1) It is used firstly of the physical size of something, specifically that which is diminutive or small. In fact, its opposite is גָּדוֹל (*gādôl*) which references that which is “massive” or “large.”

Now from this, the word came to denote anything that was of little intrinsic worth or significance. And so, it is used of that which is irrelevant and inconsequential. Here it is in the emphatic position indicating that as big as Edom thought they were, in reality God would make them so small that they would be insignificant to everyone!

Talk about irony! The proud person is one who wants the world to see how big they are on account of that in which they boast. Yet in the end (in a world ruled by God) the individual eventually will be seen for the puny man or woman that they really are before God. Such was going to be the case for Edom in time.¹⁰ This brings us to the second result, an eternal one; destruction (if outside of Christ).

Obadiah 2b, “Behold, I will make you small among the nations; you are greatly despised.”

The word for “despised” is בָּזָא (*bāzâ*) which refers to that which is held in contempt and so hated. It did have a temporal implication such that Edom eventually would be the object of hatred/ire by the nations. But ultimately the reference is that of being “despised” by the Lord and so condemned! Notice how the word is used. Moses taught the nation:

Numbers 15:31, “Because he has despised the word of the Lord and has broken His commandment, that person shall be completely cut off; his guilt *shall be* on him.”

The idea of being “cut off” is that of excommunication and ultimately eternal death! That is the end of pride- ultimately being cut off from God!

Proverbs 8:13, “The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; pride and arrogance and the evil way, and the perverted mouth, I hate.”

If I asked you this morning, “*What is the end of the individual God hates?*” what would you have said? Nothing less than the Lake of Fire! Truly, pride ends in an eternity separated from God! In fact, Solomon wrote this:

Proverbs 16:18, "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling."

In fact, if there was any lingering question at this point, consider the final verse in this section.

Obadiah 4b, "'Though you build high like the eagle, though you set your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down,' declares the Lord."

In response to the boastful and arrogant heart of the Edomites that exalted themselves above God, the promise here is that God would "bring them down" which ultimately speaks of hell!¹¹ Such is the wage of this sin!

Now to the one whose sins have not been forgiven, this is a heavy message: Your pride will cost you your soul! Yet, you need not die. You need only to humble yourself before the Lord and ask for Christ to forgive you. After Christ rose from the dead, we read of this encounter between Christ and His disciples:

Luke 25:45-47a, "Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and He said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations...'"

Did you hear that? You don't need to die in your sin; you can be forgiven! Simply come to Christ this day, by faith lay your hands on this Lamb, confess your sin and it will be transferred to Him!

If you are saved, then guard your heart against this foul weed called pride! How do you do that? It all comes down to that in which you boast!

Galatians 5:14, "But may it never be that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."

The idea behind "boasting" is that it is that in which a person takes ultimate delight. So how do you avoid pride as a Christian? Delight yourself:

- NOT in the work of your hands, your amazing personality, your morality, and the like.
- BUT in the work of Christ, His character, His perfection, and so His grace!

Truly the call of salvation is a call to "delight ourselves in the Lord" (Psalms 37:4)! That is the surest antidote of pride! Is that NOT what is meant by James:

James 4:10, "Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord [which only comes as we take our focus off of self and place it on Christ], and He will exalt you."

References

- Secker, W. (2012). *The Consistent Christian, a Handbook for Christian Living (The Nonsuch Professor)*. Bottom of the Hill.
- T.Desmond alexander, D. W. (2009). *Obadiah, Jonah and Micah (Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries)*. Downers Grove: IVP .

End Note(s)

- ¹ Eventually he would win a Nobel Laureate in Economics!
- ² Babylon is said to have claimed too much for herself as against the Holy One of Israel (Jer. 50:29). Egyptians assumed the same in subjecting the Israelites to bondage (Neh. 9:10).
- ³ cf. 1 Cor. 6:7; Matthew 9:13!
- ⁴ The same thought is contained in Neh. 9:16, 29.
- ⁵ Not surprisingly, people so characterized are lumped in with those who “work wickedness” and “tempt God” (Mal 3:15).
- ⁶ L. C. Allen wrote, “The Hebrew sela’, rocks, does not refer merely to the rugged terrain of Edom in general but alludes specifically to Sela, Edom’s capital, which was situated on the high plateau of Umm el-Biyara. This formidable rock mass could be ascended only from the southeast, the other faces consisting of perpendicular cliff-walls. Perched on the top of this natural fortress, the Edomites assimilated from their habitat a superior attitude of impregnability, which represented a defiant challenge: ‘Who can bring me down to earth?’” (*The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah*, NICOT, p. 147)
- ⁷ Similarly, God vowed to cast down the king of Babylon from his starry heights (Isa 14:12–15).
- ⁸ There is a history to this concept in Scripture... Do you remember the story of the Tower of Babel? In their united sin, mankind endeavored to work their way to heaven. That is the idea behind the tower. It was a statement of their greatness and how man did NOT need God! Consider Genesis 11:4a, “And they said, ‘Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top *will reach* into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name...” Truly the Tower of Babel, among others things, was intended to be a statement of the greatness of man. Well you may have missed a very subtle, ironic statement from Genesis 11:5. As tall as the tower had become, we read, “And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built.” As great and mighty as man may think he is, regardless of the height he might attain, God is always higher, greater, and more glorious such that He must stoop to behold what man is doing!
- ⁹ L. C. Allen also observed, “In their presumptuous pride they have reckoned without God. Over these puny creatures, sadly mistaken in their illusions of superhuman invincibility, looms the majestic figure of Yahweh. Like the eagle they are denizens of rocky heights, but were they likewise to soar into the sky above, they could not get beyond the reach of the long arm of divine justice.” (*The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah*, NICOT, p. 147)
- ¹⁰ In fact, the deposition of Edom was so certain, Obadiah used a past tense verb here- the Prophetic Perfect (as if their humbling was already complete)!
- ¹¹ This is rather ironic. In their fantasy, the Edomites were greater than the God of the Jews. Because of this, God would bring them equally in the opposite direction to the greatest point of misery and destruction- an eternity separated from God in the lake of fire- which always burns, but never consumes!