

God is God

#1 in Series: *The Rise and Fall of a Nation*
The Book of Obadiah

Proverbs 14:34 (NASB) “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to *any* people.”

The French historian, **Alexis de Tocqueville** made a journey from France to the United States in the early 1800s... It has been reported that he was on a quest to determine what was the source of America's greatness... And the great quote attributed to Alexis de Tocqueville was this –

“I went, and I looked, and I looked... The greatest of America couldn't be found in her harbors or her fields or her industry or her factories... I couldn't find the greatness of America until I went into her churches.”
And he said this: “America is great because America is good. And if America ever ceases to be good, America will cease to be great.”

If you take time-out from the bombardment of secular chatter in the news media and the cesspool of our culture's popular entertainment – and seriously ponder the plight of this nation – I think you would agree that we are in a mess...

There has never been a time, in my lifetime, when so many professing Christians are being led like “lambs to the slaughter” into the cesspool of moral decay that will bring an end to this nation...

When a person goes into a public marketplace of ideas – you will have a hard time separating the lost from the so-called saved...

God help us to see the need once again for righteousness to exalt our nation...

I read a list of the “Five most powerful empires in history” – and I would dare say that most of them, you have read or heard very little...:

- The First Persian Empire founded by Cyrus the Great 550 BC and was conquered by Alexander the Great in 330 BC
- The Roman Empire displayed the ability to conquer and hold large tracks of territory for hundreds or even thousands of years – that is if the Byzantine Empire is accounted for...

- The Caliphate – which is also known as The Arab Empire that came to power under Muhammed and arguably continues today in the Islamic religion that has more than a billion followers...
- The Mongolian Empire was “the world’s largest contiguous land empire” and was founded by the Mongol warlord Temujin, who assumed the title of Genghis Khan in AD 1206.
- The latest – and fastly declining empire – would be best known as The British Empire. The British essentially made the modern world... British institutions of representative democracy inspired French Enlightenment, and ultimately the main characteristics of the United States – a commitment to the rule of law, civil rights, and trade... The British Empire spread throughout the world and at its peak in the early 20th century, it stretched across almost a quarter of the world – the largest of any empire in history.

Akhilesh Pillalamarri is an **assistant editor at the National Interest**

(TheNationalInterest.org) wrote: – “So how does the United States of America match up with all these behemoths? The United States is certainly the world’s most powerful nation ever, militarily speaking. It combines the British ingenuity for trade with a more deeply held liberalism and continent-sized resources. Like the Romans, it has an attractive culture. Like the Mongols, it can wield total destruction. Like the Arabs, it has spread a universal ideology across the globe. Like the Persian Empires, America combines different cultures and links together regions.

For all these reasons, America has a long future ahead of it as a great power. Yet, America also needs to keep in mind the faults of previous empires if it is not to repeat them. Despite its overwhelmingly strong military, Rome fell. Internal divisions and squabbling can kill even the most powerful empires. The Persians were conquered not because they were weak but because their leadership failed. Although the Mongols could win wars, they could not win the peace and ultimately they failed to establish themselves permanently anywhere. The Arabs spawned a successful civilization, but the positive aspects of it were taken over by newcomers who relegated the Arabs to subservience. And finally, the British were exhausted in trying to uphold their interests, global order, and European system, trying to do too many things at once, while also burning themselves out.”

As we think about the Empires that have come and gone throughout world history – what was the common thread that led to their rise... And what was / is the common thread – if any – that contributes to their decline?

In a passage that we should all study very carefully, we find this truth:

Romans 13:1 (NASB) “Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.”

So the short answer to what accounts for the rise of nations is – God... He is sovereign in the establishing of nations for whatever His purpose... Yet – God gives a lot of freedom to a people of any nation to make choices that will either be a blessing to them as a nation – or will actually contribute to the decline and even fall of that nation...

Today we will begin a study of the rise and fall of a little known nation – that provides for us huge lessons that we need to learn... Years ago I adopted a proverb (not found in the Bible – but is biblical in its intent)... That proverb is: “A wise person learns from their own mistakes. A wiser person learns from the mistakes of others.”

The book of **Obadiah** is the shortest book of the OT and is just as inspired by God as any of our more favorite books like Genesis, Psalms, The Gospels, Romans or any of the Epistles...

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NASB)

¹⁶ All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

Now if we believe that scripture, then we necessarily believe that the 21 verses contained in **Obadiah** were also given by the inspiration of God for our benefit; that we might grow as the men and women of God through studying it...

I believe that!... I believe that you do too, so as we begin our study, let us pause and pray, and may our prayer be that God would open our minds and hearts to receive the message contained in this short, but powerful book and make the appropriate application to our lives, so that we might be “doers of the Word, and not hearers only.”

Verse 1 begins with the words: “The vision of Obadiah.”

Who was this man called Obadiah? The Bible mentions several men by this name, at least twelve of them, but none seem to be this particular one.

- In 1 Kings 18 we read about a man by this name that hid the Lord’s prophets in caves during the time of Elijah and Ahab.
- In 2 Chronicles 17 we are told about a law teacher named Obadiah that Jehoshaphat sent into the cities of Judah to preach the Word of God.
- There are several others mentioned, but none seem to be this man.

Our prophet Obadiah raises from seemingly nowhere, proclaims the message God has given him, then returns to obscurity, leaving us only to think about God and the message pronounced. Is this so wrong or odd? Even Obadiah’s name – “servant of Yahweh” suggests that when we are true servants of God, it will not matter that our identity goes unknown to the world at large, because it is God and His Word that we want to draw attention to instead of ourselves.

It is for this reason that we find the next phrase...

“Thus says the Lord GOD concerning Edom”

Obadiah didn’t proclaim his message, he didn’t express his feelings about Edom or what he might have thought about this sister nation. Instead, he got out of the way and proclaimed, “Thus says the Lord GOD...”

From this little phrase, let’s consider a few of the attributes of God that will help to lay a foundation for what will be said in the following twenty verses.

1. God is Sovereign

How is it that over and over in the Scriptures we find this little phrase, “thus says the Lord GOD”?... “Thus says the Lord”, or “Thus says the Lord GOD” is stated by various prophets and other men in the Bible over 700 times.

Why would they say that?... It was because they realized something of the sovereignty of God!...

Sovereign is a word reserved for the One Who has Supreme power and authority!... And there is great power and authority in that little statement. There is boldness and confidence – and it’s no wonder – after all, the God Who created it all has complete power and authority to dictate how it will all unfold throughout history.

When you think about the sovereignty of God, remember Hannah’s prayer in –1 Sam. 2. Hannah had been unable to bear children, but you remember that the Lord gave her a son. She took this son and gave him to the Lord at a very young age, and on the day she took young Samuel to the tabernacle, she broke out with a prayer of great praise to the Lord. In that prayer she said,

1 Samuel 2:6-8 (NASB)

⁶“The LORD kills and makes alive;
He brings down to Sheol and raises up.

⁷“The LORD makes poor and rich;
He brings low, He also exalts.

⁸“He raises the poor from the dust,
He lifts the needy from the ash heap
To make them sit with nobles,
And inherit a seat of honor;
For the pillars of the earth are the LORD’S,
And He set the world on them.

In Job 33:13, Job’s friend asked him this question:

Job 33:13 (NASB) “Why do you complain against Him that He does not give an account of all His doings?”

Later in the same book the Lord is speaking to Job and He makes this statement,

Job 41:11 (NASB) “Who has given to Me that I should repay *him*?
Whatever is under the whole heaven is Mine.

Listen, don’t ever doubt the sovereignty of God. He is omnipotent, that is, God is all-powerful and is able to perform all His holy will. He can do anything He wants to do, and His exercise of power over all His creation is His sovereignty. God’s sovereignty is His exercise of rule as Creator and King.

How do the prophets bring this out? How does a little book like Obadiah express the sovereignty of God? As we continue in the book, we're going to discover that God pronounces judgment on the little nation of Edom, and in His own timing He executes that judgment. He does what He is good and necessary because He is in perfect and complete control.

Kings can say what they want, nations can attempt to do what they want, but in the final analysis of it all, none can escape the sovereignty of God...

Do you remember what Daniel told King Nebuchadnezzar?

Daniel 2:20-21 (NASB)

²⁰ Daniel said, "Let the name of God be blessed forever and ever, For wisdom and power belong to Him. ²¹ "It is He who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings; He gives wisdom to wise men and knowledge to men of understanding."

The prophets show us that God is the sovereign Lord of history and that nothing happens, either to Israel or to the gentile nations, that is not the result of God's direct determination.

The great flood of Genesis 6 was the direct result of the sovereign will of God. The plagues on Egypt were His doing. The locust plague in Joel was His doing. The fall of Jerusalem was His doing, just as were so many more of the events of Scripture.

Whatever problems you might have with God's actions, don't ever doubt for a moment that God is in charge of what happens in our lives. We may not like it, you may not agree with it, we might even not want to go along with it, but you can be sure of this – that God is in control whether we like it or not!

Now, one thing you'll have to admit is this – that no matter how much I think on the sovereignty of God, you just don't get it sometimes.

Does God decree all things that happen in the world? Can anything happen that He does not determine will happen? Every believer who meditates on God's providence will sooner or later come to a point where he or she will have to say, "I cannot fully understand this doctrine"... In some ways that must be said about every doctrine, since our understanding is finite, and God is infinite.

While we will never understand fully the nature of God, we can learn how to respond to it. For instance, we can learn to respond to God's sovereignty...

- By not being afraid, but rather by **trusting in God**. Listen, if He is really sovereign, and your life is in His hands, then why should you fear? Trust Him, after all, who else cares for you the way He does? The prophets must have lived with this great sense of awe of the Lord. They heard firsthand His desire for people and nations and how He would bless or curse them according to how they responded to Him. These faithful men of God had to learn to trust God as their own lives were put on the line in order to serve Him.
- By **being thankful for all things** that happen. If we genuinely believe that God is in control of all things, and God always acts according to His goodness, then we should be thankful for what He does, even when we don't understand it... We mentioned some of God's judgments earlier. In the midst of the flood, could Noah be thankful?... In the midst of the plagues, could Israel be thankful?... As God judged the nations mentioned throughout the prophets, was there reason to be thankful?... INDEED there was!... In fact, we are told to be thankful in all things aren't we?

1 Thess. 5:18 (NASB) "in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

- By **learning that** there is no such thing as luck, chance or fate. **All things come to pass by God's sovereign will**. The universe is not governed by impersonal fate or luck, but by a personal and loving God. Nothing "just happens"... There is no such thing as coincidence. We need to learn to see God's hand in events throughout the day, causing all things to work together for good for those who love Him.

2. God is Holy

If God's sovereignty is splashed all over the book of Obadiah and the other writings of the prophets – then so does His attribute of Holiness!

Again, quoting from Hannah's prayer in –

1 Samuel 2:2 (NASB) "There is no one holy like the LORD, indeed, there is no one besides You, nor is there any rock like our God.

Also:

Exodus 15:11 (NASB) “Who is like You among the gods, O LORD? who is like You, majestic in holiness, Awesome in praises, working wonders?”

Writer after writer throughout the Bible declared the holiness of God.

I love to read **Isaiah 6**, where we find the prophet Isaiah standing before the Lord high and lifted up, and what does he recognize immediately? The holiness of God! God’s holiness means that He is separated from sin and is devoted to seeking His own honor. His articles of worship are to be holy. The place where God Himself dwells is holy. God Himself is the Most Holy One, and He demands that His people be holy.

An awareness of God’s holiness was the driving force behind the prophets’ sharp condemnation of sin. It makes no difference where the sin was found, whether in foreign lands like Edom or Ninevah, or among God’s people – it was an offense to God and called for judgment. Nowhere in the Bible will you find stronger pronouncements against sin and calls for a deep and thorough repentance than in the writings of the Minor Prophets like Obadiah. Apart from repentance, judgment falls.

Has God changed over the centuries? Is He any less holy today than He was in the day of Obadiah? Of course not! His hatred of sin and evil are just as strong today as it was yesterday... His desire for us to be people of holiness is just as passionate as it ever was...

What we need as His people is a fresh glimpse of who He is! We need to come to the throne of God and see the Lord high and lifted up! We need to see that God in His holiness is a God who hates every sin in us, every part of our being that hasn’t been brought into conformity with His Word, and without true repentance, judgment will fall...

True repentance is more than just lip-service. True repentance means that you have godly sorrow for your sin and that you have turned away from the sin for which you are sorry. If you only felt sorrow, but you did not turn away, then there was no true repentance... If you recognize God’s holiness, then you’ll have no problem coming humbly to Him in a way that is pleasing to Him. It is my hope and desire that all of us, myself included, will walk away from our study in this little book with a renewed sense of the awesome purity and holiness of the Lord God of heaven.

3. God is Love

Now for a great many people, it is difficult to see how God can be sovereign and holy, executing judgment against sin, and still be called a God of love. How is it that a loving God can judge the nations the way He does?

We will see that God demonstrates His love for His children in ways that those children often fail to recognize...

People often misunderstand and therefore misrepresent God. They say things like the God was all about *law* in the OT and all about *love* in the NT... That somehow, God Himself went through some kind of transformation – and changed from being a God of Judgement to being a God of grace... Or that God had a temper-tantrum in the OT and became tender in the NT... THAT, my friends is a misrepresentation of God...

You may recall from our time in the book of Malachi that –

Malachi 3:6a (NASB) “For I, the LORD, do not change...”

The psalmist declared a strong contrast between God and man (specifically those who oppose God’s people) –

Psalm 102:26-27 (NASB)

²⁶ “Even they will perish, but You endure;
And all of them will wear out like a garment;
Like clothing You will change them and they will be changed.
²⁷ “But You are the same,
And Your years will not come to an end.”

James said –

James 1:17 New International Version (NIV) “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.”

And the Holy Spirit through the Apostle John clearly declares –

1 John 4:8b (NASB) “... God is love”!

So how was God’s love demonstrated in the OT?... I submit there were many ways – but let me speak to just a couple:

➤ **God's love was expressed by His giving of laws.** The law is like a great fence that shows us where the boundaries are. If God did not love, then He wouldn't care what people did or whether people would obey Him...

We see this all the time with irresponsible parents... If parents really loved their children they would lay down some laws, some rules and make their children be obedient to those rules... For instance, do you know why no parent in this room would allow your child to play in a busy street?... It is because you love them! You communicate that love first by laying down the law: "You are not to play in the street!"...

➤ **God's love was expressed in His judgement of sin.**

What happens then when your child plays in the street?... Does your great love for them make you smile about their disobedience? – of course not!... If you really loved your child, you would run out there, get your child off the street and discipline them for their disobedience... Now, suppose I came along and saw you spanking your child. Could I rightly say that because I saw you spanking your kid that you didn't love him? If you loved him you wouldn't punish him. How would you respond to me?...

It is no different with God... When the laws of God are disobeyed there must be a judgment... God's Justice demands that sin be judged. God's love is in perfect agreement with His attitude toward sin!... He cannot allow sin to go unpunished... God laid down the rules in the law. He sent His prophets out proclaiming His message to be obedient to Him, to repent of sin and enjoy His blessings or suffer the consequences. When nations like Nineveh or Edom or even Israel refused to obey, then God in His love had to execute justice.

So, it was because of God's love for His people that he sent prophets like Obadiah with a message of judgment, and eventually, even the judgment itself... God knows that sin is an outrage against Himself, humanity, and even the one pursuing the sin. He knows that sin is destructive, so He judges it... His love demands it.

So how do we see this truth of Who God is in the book of Obadiah?... Where do we see the love of God? We see it in the way God's justice is demonstrated in defense of His children. God will execute Divine Judgement upon His enemies because of their sin against Himself and against His children!...

Don't leave me here ...

Throughout the OT we see many pictures of great truth that will be explained clearly in the NT...

Several weeks ago I shared a quote with you that Pastor Kemp reminded me of – it is a great quote from – **Augustine** – *“In the Old Testament, you have the New Testament concealed. In the New Testament, you have the Old Testament revealed.”*

This truth will be born out further in the unfolding of the NT... You see, when God moves to Judge sin – it is actually a demonstration of His Divine Glory – including a demonstration of His Divine LOVE!...

You do recognize, don't you, that when God poured out His Divine Wrath / His Judgement upon Christ – that it was because of His great Love for those whom He would save?...

There only need be one verse in all the Bible to secure this point – but there are actually several:

John 3:16 (NASB) “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

What does it mean that God “gave His only begotten Son”?... Gave Him for what?... In short – God the Father gave us His Son as the “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29).

1 John 4:10 (NASB) “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”

Romans 5:8 (NASB) “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

But remember – in order for you or I to be delivered from God's Just Wrath for our sin – we must turn to the Only One Who can save us from that Wrath!... That is Christ!

John 3:36 (NASB) “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”

So let me summarize and come to a close:

The book of Obadiah emphasizes some wonderful attributes of God. It emphasizes His sovereignty. It emphasizes His holiness, and it emphasizes His love. We need to be reminded of these things today. As individuals, as a church and as a nation we need to be reminded of just who God is.

Who is God in your life? Is He the sovereign Lord and King? Is His will your will? Are His desires your desires? Is His nature becoming your nature?

We have talked about God’s holiness. In your own life today, have you been wrestling with some sin and running from God? Israel did. Other nations did, but God wouldn’t allow it to continue without calling them to either repentance or judgement...

He won’t allow it in your life either. Maybe when you think of sin you are thinking of what we all consider to be the standard sins – smoking, drinking and cursing, but there is so much more that God is interested in. How does your life measure up in the area of self-control? What about truthfulness? Do you find yourself wrestling with some ungodly ambition for something? What about in the area of sinful habits? Have you surrendered those to Christ?

God in His great love invites you to an intimate relationship with Himself – where you and I can find deliverance from those things that deserve only His Judgement... Listen – no matter who you are or what you have done in your life, God is pursuing you... Have you ever experienced the love of Christ?... Why not call upon to save you right now?

Questions to be considered in Community Group:

(Choose what would be best for your group. Please expand as you determine better questions.)

- What do we know about Obadiah? What does his name mean?

- What does the phrase “Thus says the Lord GOD” imply? How should Christians today respond to this statement?

- What does it mean that God is Sovereign? Does that term encourage or frighten you?

- Why should we conclude that “Thus says the Lord” says something about God’s holiness? What does holy mean? How did the OT prophets know God is holy? Why should His holiness concern Christians today?

- Have you ever heard someone say that the God of the OT and the God of the NT are two different gods – or anything similar to that?

- How do we know that God is immutable (unchanging)? Why do people say that the God of the OT is different than what they believe about God?

- How do we know that God is love? Why does this truth about God not contradict His sovereignty or holiness or exercise of justice?

- What are your thoughts about the statement the God is the One Who establishes nations – that He determines if they *rise* or *fall*?

- How can our nation become a nation that God could bless?