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God Protects His People

In 2 Kings 6 we read that Elisha was trapped in a city with the Arameans seeking his life outside the city. When his servant began to despair, Elisha prayed for God to open his eyes.

2 Kings 6:17b, "...And the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha."

The tendency is to read a this and wish it were true of us... *But alas! We live in the hum-drum of life where nothing amazing ever happens.* Oh, how we are ever mistaken! We read this at the end of the Great Commission:

Matthews 28:20b, "...and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Do you understand what this means? We have something more glorious and more amazing than Elisha and his servant could have imagined; for in Christ, the one and only true God — not simply an angel, but the Lord Himself — goes "with us." In fact, He is NOT simply with us, BUT Scripture teaches us that He goes:

- Within us, Ephesians 1:13.
- Beside us, Matthews 28:20b.
- Before us, Isaiah 52:12.
- Behind us, Is. 52:12.

In light of this we can live in light of the promise God gave to Joshua so long ago.

Joshua 1:9b, "Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

And yet to use an expression of Christ, "You shall see greater things than these!" (John 1:50b) For get this, NOT ONLY is God with us in a tangible way, BUT according to His Covenant Promise, it is His intention "to fight for us while we keep silent" (cf. Exodus 14:14)! After all, what is it that God promised all His people in Abraham?

Genesis 12:3b, "...the one who curses you I will curse..."

It is this promise that we see worked out in the text before us! Recall, shortly after God's people began their long journey to Babylon in chains, God sent a shepherd to minister to His people. His name was Obadiah. The third message God gave to His people in their sorrow and grief was to remind them of His promise to "curse those who curse you" (Genesis 12:3). That is the focus of vv. 10-14.

God is protective of His people.

Obadiah 10, "Because of violence to your brother Jacob, you will be covered *with* shame, and you will be cut off forever."

Recall the "violence" that Edom perpetrated against God's people.¹ Speaking of the Babylonian conquest of 586 BC.

Obadiah 11a, "On the day that you stood aloof..."

The word for "aloof" indicates that Edom stood high, far off, or removed from their Jewish cousins. When God's people were at their lowest, Edom was at their highest when it came to their wretchedness and rebellion. Rather than defend their brethren or pity them, their initial response was to "stand afar off," watching! But this didn't last long...

Obadiah 11b, "...on the day that strangers carried off his wealth, and foreigners entered his gate and cast lots for Jerusalem- you too were as one of them."

To be "as one of them" indicates that though Edom did NOT cast lots for Jerusalem,² nevertheless it is as if they did. As we have seen, when Jerusalem was conquered, and its inhabitants murdered, raped, tortured, or placed in chains, Edom watched in glee!³ Yet this likewise didn't last long, for soon their watching turned into verbal barbs...

Obadiah 12-13a, "Do not gloat over your brother's day, the day of his misfortune. And do not rejoice over the sons of Judah in the day of their destruction; yes, do not boast in the day of *their* distress. Do not enter the gate of My people in the day of their disaster. Yes, you, do not gloat over their calamity in the day of their disaster..."

In addition to watching with glee, the indication here is that as God's people were being ravished, Edom mocked those being attacked, making fun of them- the way they screamed, the way they suffered, the way they ran for their lives, and the way they died! But then it got worse.

Obadiah 13b, "...And do not loot their wealth in the day of their disaster."

As we might expect, Edom's disdain for Israel eventually turned into active harm! It began with Edomites "looting" Israel!⁴ And yet still it didn't stop here...

Obadiah 14, "And do not stand at the fork of the road to cut down their fugitives; and do not imprison their survivors in the day of their distress."

During the devastation of Babylon's destruction of Jerusalem, there were Jewish escapees. Those that went south were greeted by their Edomite brethren. But rather than help their brethren, the Edomites killed some and culled the rest, sending them back to their Babylonian captors (cf. also Ezekiel 35:3-5)! And because of *ALL* of this, the doom of the Edomites was sealed...

Obadiah 15, "For the day of the Lord draws near on all the nations. As you have done, it will be done to you. Your dealings will return on your own head."

And that is exactly what happened! As we have seen, soon after Judah was taken into exile, many an Edomite also was enchained and deported (cf. v. 7). Then in the fifth century, the remnant was attacked by the Arabs as the Nabatean kingdom expanded into the east side of the Transjordan at this time... and Edom fell! Now those that survived fled and settled in the Negev (south of Judah in the wilderness) where they remained until 70 A.D. when they were completely wiped out by the Romans, in accordance with the promise God made here in Obadiah 18b!

Now again consider, why is it that Edom was going to suffer so? Because they attacked God's people.

Obadiah 10, "Because of violence to your brother Jacob, you will be covered *with* shame, and you will be cut off forever."

Truly, God's people are never alone... never bereft. Because Edom attacked Judah, God would attack Edom!

As we consider this, we might be tempted to think, "*What possible application could this prophecy have in my life today? It has now been 2,000 years since this prophecy was fulfilled!*" Great question! In answering it, consider a couple of points:

It most certainly has been 2,000 years since this prophecy was fulfilled. Again, in 70 A.D. the Edomites were completely destroyed. Yet, has time ever been a limiting factor when it comes to God's promises? Peter raised this very issue when he wrote to those in his day, "Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with *their* mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying:

2 Peter 3:3-4: 'Where is the promise of His coming? For *ever* since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation.'

What is the divine response?

2 Peter 3:8, "But do not let this one *fact* escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."

In other words, God's promises are NOT impacted in the least by time!!! If God made a promise, regardless of when He made it, it most certainly will be fulfilled- for you see, "...Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35)!

In fact, the case in point is the text before us! At the time of the fulfillment of the prophecy of Obadiah, it likewise had roughly been 2,000 years since God gave the original promise to Abraham!⁵ Consider the original promise.

Genesis 12:1-3, "Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to (1) the land which I will show you; and (2) I will make you a great nation, and (3) I will bless you, and make your name great; and so (4) you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and (5) the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'

While this passage contains multiple promises, that which is most relevant to our study this morning is the fifth promise found in v. 3b, "...and the one who curses you I will curse."

Do you understand what this means? When the gospel was preached to Abraham (cf. Galatians 3:8, 14), God included a significant promise: If any man attacks or abuses a child of God, they will have the Lord to deal with! It is as we read in Matthew.

Matthews 21:44a, “And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces...”

And that is exactly what happened 2,000 years later when Edom cursed God’s people! Notice the text... because Edom attacked God’s people, the Lord promised two negative consequences.

Obadiah 10b, “...you will be covered *with* shame...”

The word for “shame” is בִּיְשָׁה (bûšâ). In contrast to the English connotation of this word which stresses the inner attitude of the feeling of shame, the word here focusses on the coming to shame which stresses outer, public disgrace!⁶

In this regard recall, Edom was a proud nation (cf. Obadiah 3) with three primary boasts:

1. They were wealthy (on account of the King’s Highway that went right through their land),
2. They were impregnable and so thought to be inviolable as a nation, and lastly,
3. They were intellectually sophisticated and so known for their wisdom. What would happen to these boasts? On account of their sin, Edom would lose it all!

In no time following the exile, the Edomites became as animals on account of their sin (though they had knowledge, their sin robbed them of their understanding, cf. Romans 1:21, 24, 26, 28)!

By the fifth century BC, their power was gone along with their wealth as they now lived like vagabonds in the wilderness south of Palestine! As such, the once proud Edomite became a laughing stock in the ancient world, “they were covered with shame”! In fact, from fifth century onward they suffered open and continual ridicule, “*So this is an unconquerable, wise Edomite!!*” And yet, it didn’t end there. Notice the second consequence of their sin against God’s people from verse 10.

Obadiah 10c, “...and you will be cut off forever.”

This references two things. First a temporal destruction. To be “cut off” (כָּרַת [karat]) is to be rooted out, eliminated, removed, or *destroyed by a violent act of man or nature*. That is exactly what happened in 70 A.D. when every Edomite that remained on the earth was either executed by crucifixion or killed in battle! Theirs most certainly was a violent end!⁷ But then added word, “forever” brings this destruction to the next level, referencing their eternal damnation (cf. Ezekiel 35:9)!

Now again, why was that? Biblically what is to explain God's vendetta against this nation? The answer: They cursed God's people, so God cursed them!

Family of God awaken to this important truth: accompanying the gospel by which we are saved is the assurance of protection and vindication: Those who Curse us will be Cursed! And so, woe to the man, woman, people, or nation that attacks a Christian! Such an action brings with it dreadful consequences! Ask Egypt because of their mistreatment of the people of God, the Lord set His hand against the nation, cursing it with Plagues. After the final plague — the death of Egypt's first born — Egypt was greatly humbled. And so we read this:

Exodus 12:33, "And the Egyptians urged the people, to send them out of the land in haste, for they said, 'We shall all be dead.'"

Family of God, no one messes with God's people and gets away with it! Ask the Assyrians about their initial attitude of the Assyrians as they attacked God's people in 722 BC as well as God's response.

Isaiah 10:10-12, "'As my hand has reached to the kingdoms of the idols, whose graven images *were* greater than those of Jerusalem and Samaria, shall I not do to Jerusalem and her images just as I have done to Samaria and her idols?' [now God's response...] 12 So it will be that when the Lord has completed all His work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, *He will say*, 'I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria and the pomp of his haughtiness.'"

It wasn't but a little more than a hundred years after this, that Assyria was no more! Why? Again, it was because of their mistreatment of God's people!

Ask the Babylonians, as they attacked God's people in 605 BC,

Habakkuk 1:11, "Then they will sweep through *like* the wind and pass on. BUT they will be held guilty."

Once again, it wasn't but 65 years later and Babylon would be no more! Why? They mistreated God's people!

Ask Edom whose destruction was announced in our text! Why was Edom wiped off the face of the earth? The clear and obvious answer for the text before us is because of their mistreatment of God's people! O. Palmer Robertson, describing the curse that comes from opposing God's people, said this:

Haman hangs on his own gallows (Esther 7:10). Daniel's adversaries perish in the very den of lions into which they had cast him (Daniel 6:25 [Eng. 24]). He who digs a pit to entrap the righteous falls into the same ditch that he has made (Psalms 7:6 [Eng. 5]). Abimelech and Shechem, conspiring rebels in the days of the Judges, are cursed with the

curse of self-destruction (Judges 9:19–20). Facing a mighty coalition of enemy nations, Judah under Jehoshaphat must stand still and see the salvation of the Lord (2 Chronicles 20:17). When God’s people look across the wilderness, they see a vast array of the corpses of their enemies, for the Lord had set them against one another (2 Chronicles 20:24). Characteristic of the last great conflict will be a warfare in which each of the Lord’s enemies shall eat the flesh of his own arm (Isaiah 9:19 [Eng. 20]; cf. Ezekiel 38:21; Zechariah 14:13). (Roberstons, 1990, p. 240)

Truly to attack or oppose the Christian is to incur a dreadful judgment- which is why after the Apostles were persecuted for preaching Christ, they included this in their prayer...

Acts 4:29a, “And now, Lord, take note of their threats...”

Why did they pray this? Because they knew that to mess with God’s people was to incur a stricter judgment!

Why is that? When a person is saved by the blood of Christ, they become members of Christ’s body... such that to attack a Christian is to attack God Himself!

Ephesians 1:3-4a, 7, “Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him... In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace.”

Did you notice the phrase “in Christ”? This speaks of a literal, though spiritual connecting of the believer to Christ. In theology we call this the doctrine of Union with Christ. Because we are “in Christ” we literally constitute His body! Remember the statement Christ made to Paul at his conversion? We read of Paul:

Acts 9:4-5, “And he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ And he said, ‘Who art Thou, Lord?’ And He *said*, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.’”

Because of the doctrine of Union with Christ- where we literally, though spiritually are united to Christ on account of salvation — to attack a Christian is to attack the Lord Himself!

1 Corinthians 3:16-17a, “Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you? // If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him...”

Family of God, when you attack the church/the Christian and you attack God. Attack God and He will attack you! It is that simple! Now Christian, what would be your prediction as it relates to the well-being of a person who defies God? Who stares God in the face and says, “I hate

you!”? Or, who would dare lift a finger against Christ unto His destruction? We would expect that God would curse them just as He promised in Genesis 12:3!

How do we apply a passage like this?

We begin by recognizing that the book before us was written NOT to warn the Edomites, BUT to comfort God’s people! In this regard consider, the idea that God might accompany us as He did with Elisha (which He does, cf. Matthew 28:20) is inspirational! The idea that when we became Christians we were united to Christ such that everywhere we go we bring Christ with us is life changing! As a child of God, do you realize that you are Christ to this world?!

2 Corinthians 2:15, “For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.”

How this ought to radically alter the way we live, how we act, and even what we say!

2 Corinthians 5:20, “Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ [what is an ambassador? Not a representative of a nation, but the nation itself (which is why where they live is US soil). As this is true, notice the implication...], as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”

The Christian is ever mindful that when he opens his mouth, he speaks on behalf of God!

This at first might appear to put a burden on us, but it doesn’t. For as we are united to Christ, we shall forever enjoy God’s endorsement! Think of it. Can you imagine God rooting against His Son in anything? Can you imagine God wishing His son ill? Listen! If we are in Christ, then what ALWAYS is God’s disposition toward us? He is cheering us on! He not only is wishing but working for our good!

That means God’s people in exile, who were in exile on account of their own sin and rebellion, nevertheless at all times:

- We’re pleasing to the Lord.
- Had God on their side.
- We’re NOT the object of God’s disdain, BUT the object of God’s love and compassion!

Talk about life changing! Never do we walk on this earth under any form of condemnation whatsoever (cf. Romans 8:1)! In fact, listen to the glorious promise with which Paul used to comfort the Romans:

Romans 8:31, “What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *is* against us?”

The implied answer is, “No One of Any Importance!”

- Yes, the Gentiles might rage... Satan may buffet... and trials may come!
- Yet what is a particle of dust to an airplane? What is a fly to a rhinoceros? NOTHING AT ALL!

And that ultimately is what any and every adversary is to the child of God! At best all they can do is touch our body... they cannot harm our soul (cf. Matthews 10:28)! As such Paul brought this teaching to its natural conclusion.

Romans 8:37b, “...we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us...”

This is NOT to say there won't be hard days or difficult people in our lives. But as our focus is set on God, we understand that in and through all things God is with us. Any and every attack that we endure is ultimately against God.

Accordingly, we live with the glorious expectation that “weeping may last for the night, but a shout of joy is soon coming in the morning [that is, at the dawn of the New Heavens and Earth!]” (Psalms 30:6b)! Accordingly, today we heed the message God gave to Joshua as He stood before the Promise Land

Joshua 1:5b-6a, “...Just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you. Be strong and courageous...”

This was the message God would have His exiled people embody as they live on this earth as strangers and aliens!

References

Roberstons, O. P. (1990). *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah (New International Commentary on the Old Testament)*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

End Note(s)

¹ C. E. Armerding wrote, “The noun ‘violence’ (ḥāmās) denotes both moral wrong and overt physical brutality (cf. Hab 1:2), both of which had characterized the course of Edom’s relations with Israel.” (*Daniel and the Minor Prophets*, EBC, p. 7347)

² cf. Psalms 22:18; Joel 3:3; Nah. 3:10; Matthews 27:35.

³ cf. Genesis 21:16; 2 Sam. 18:13; 2 Kgs. 2:7.

⁴ 1 Esdras 4:45 blames the Edomites for burning the temple in Jerusalem, but this is unconfirmed (cf.

Lam. 4:21–22).

⁵ Based on ceramic evidence found in Sodom and Gomorrah, the date range of Abraham is 2,300 BC to 1,900 BC.

⁶ D. W. Baker wrote, “The ironic twist is that garments are used most commonly to cover one’s shame (e.g., Genesis 9:23; Hos. 2:9; cf. Genesis 3:7, 21), but here it is shame that covers the nation.” (*Joel, Obadiah, Malachi*, NIVAC, p. 180)

⁷ It also involved eternal destruction as well, cf. Ezekiel 35:9.