

The Friends of God

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

Obadiah :17-21a

We come to the third message in our study of the book of Obadiah... We have thought through some of the most powerful words to ever enter the mind of man, when we considered the great truth that God is God... He is sovereign, holy and love... And despite the unchanging awesome truths about God – He still has enemies who arrogantly oppose everything about Him – including opposing those who follow Him...

Today, we come to come to one of the most encouraging concepts in this prophecy... And it has to do with the people of God – whom we will refer to as the Friends of God...

If you were to divide the whole human race into two categories – you could find no simpler terms that accurately accomplish that division than – *enemy* or *friend*... An enemy is a foe, an opposer, one who not only dislikes, but desires to harm... A friend is not only someone with whom you are on good terms – but someone you like. They are someone you want to spend time with and do things with and someone you look for ways to just be in their presence... The best of friends come to love one another...

So, when it comes to your relationship with God – which category do you most identify? Are you a friend of God, or His enemy?... You may say – “*Don’t try to box me in like that pastor – I don’t like labels!*”... and I get that – but trying to dodge the issue does not absolve you from the reality that you are either one or the other... You are either a friend of God, or His enemy...

No one has more clearly drawn the dividing line than did Jesus:

Matthew 12:30 (NASB) “He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters.”

Sometimes we need for the Lord to awaken us to a realm of reality to which we are oblivious... We need a “wake-up call”... and one of those wake-up calls that everyone needs, is to realize their need to become a friend of God...

So, what is a friend of God? What does it look like for God to call someone a friend?... As we begin to think on those concepts in this book – let’s take the time to read the book in its entirety, which we have yet to do together in this series:

¹ The vision of Obadiah.

Thus says the Lord GOD concerning Edom—

We have heard a report from the LORD,

And an envoy has been sent among the nations *saying*,

“Arise and let us go against her for battle”—

² “Behold, I will make you small among the nations;

You are greatly despised.

³ “The arrogance of your heart has deceived you,

You who live in the clefts of the rock,

In the loftiness of your dwelling place,

Who say in your heart,

‘Who will bring me down to earth?’

⁴ “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.

⁵ “If thieves came to you,

If robbers by night —

O how you will be ruined!—

Would they not steal *only* until they had enough?

If grape gatherers came to you,

Would they not leave *some* gleanings?

⁶ “O how Esau will be ransacked,

And his hidden treasures searched out!

⁷”All the men allied with you
Will send you forth to the border,
And the men at peace with you
Will deceive you and overpower you.

They who eat your bread

Will set an ambush for you.

(There is no understanding in him. (in Esau))

⁸”Will I not on that day,” declares the LORD,
“Destroy wise men from Edom

And understanding from the mountain of Esau?

⁹”Then your mighty men will be dismayed, O Teman,

So that everyone may be cut off from the mountain of Esau by slaughter.

¹⁰”Because of violence to your brother Jacob,

You will be covered *with* shame,

And you will be cut off forever.

¹¹”On the day that you stood aloof,

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.

¹²”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.

¹³”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.

And do not loot their wealth

In the day of their disaster.

¹⁴”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.

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.

¹⁶”Because just as you drank on My holy mountain,
All the nations will drink continually.
They will drink and swallow
And become as if they had never existed.

¹⁷”But on Mount Zion there will be those who escape,
And it will be holy.

And the house of Jacob will possess their possessions.

¹⁸”Then the house of Jacob will be a fire
And the house of Joseph a flame;
But the house of Esau *will be* as stubble.
And they will set them on fire and consume them,
So that there will be no survivor of the house of Esau,”
For the LORD has spoken.

¹⁹ Then *those of* the Negev will possess the mountain of Esau,
And *those of* the Shephelah the Philistine *plain*;
Also, possess the territory of Ephraim and the territory of Samaria,
And Benjamin *will possess* Gilead.

²⁰ And the exiles of this host of the sons of Israel,
Who are *among* the Canaanites as far as Zarephath,
And the exiles of Jerusalem who are in Sepharad
Will possess the cities of the Negev.

²¹ The deliverers will ascend Mount Zion
To judge the mountain of Esau,
And the kingdom will be the LORD’S.

Wow!... There is a lot there – isn’t there?...

Before we begin our focus on the subject of what it means for God to call someone a fiend – I want to offer you some insight that will help us

appreciate the value of studying any portion of God’s Word – especially these obscure passages such as what Obadiah is for most of us...

Ray Stedman was one of the best expository preachers of his day. He has been in heaven for almost 30 years – but has left us the fruit of a lifetime of study... His library is worth your perusal and I recommend him as one resource you should come to know... he said; – “God is a great illustrator. He is always using pictures for us so that we can understand truth more easily, more graphically. We are children in this respect. We like to have a picture. We would rather see something than hear it, so God has many pictures. He has taken these two men and the subsequent nations that came from them and used them through the Bible as a consistent picture of the conflict between the flesh and the spirit -- Jacob and Esau, Israel and Edom.

(This, by the way, is a wonderful key to Bible study. Have you learned to recognize what we might call interpretational constants that run throughout the scriptures? There are certain names and figures, or metaphors and similes that, once used to symbolize a thing, maintain that characteristic and that reference all the way through the Bible, wherever they are used. You know how this is true of certain items, certain material things, like oil. Wherever oil is used symbolically in Scriptures it is a picture of the Holy Spirit. Wine is always a picture of joy in the Scriptures. Leaven is always a picture of evil. These two men, Jacob and Esau, and the nations Israel and Edom, always appear as a picture of a struggle between the flesh and the spirit that is going on in our own lives as believers. Esau lusts against Jacob, and Jacob against Esau; the two great principles are irreconcilably opposed to one another.)”

So, Stedman may have just introduced to you a concept you may have realized, but didn’t have a name for – *interpretational constants*... It is a principle in Bible study that helps us to not miss the beauty and power of a great truth God is revealing...

So – back to Obadiah... We saw last week what an enemy of God looks like – as illustrated by Esau and the Edomites... Today let's see what this book tells us about being a friend of God... The first thing we need to see is that:

1. The Friends of God are God's Personal People

In :13 of **Obadiah**, we saw that God called the Israelites “**My people**”.

Now, most people, who have a monotheistic worldview – believe that all people are in fact God's people... After all, God made all people... And God made all people in His image... So in that sense – yes – all people are God's people.

But throughout the Old and New Testaments, God also displays a special concern for a smaller circle of people whom He refers to as “**My people**”... which He calls the Israelites here... This smaller circle consists of those to whom God has spoken, and who have repented of their sins and accepted God at His word.

God is the Friend of His people. He cares for His people.

If you are a non-Christian, have you thought about becoming one of God's people?... Many people have assumed that they are already one of God's people because of their birth... But the only way you can truly be one of God's people – one who belongs to Him – is by hearing the promises of God Word, believing those promises, and then responding to them... Apart from a belief in God's promises, you can only expect God's correct judgment for your sin...

Yet if you will receive God's promises in Jesus Christ, you can become God's friend, now and forever... That is why God took on flesh, became a man, lived a perfect life among us, died on the cross, and bore the right punishment for the sins of all of those people who would ever turn from their sins and trust in Christ and His promises.

The Friends of God are God's Personal People.

2. The Friends of God have God's Promised Vindication

By that I mean – God promises to judge those who persecute His people...

Remember what Jesus said about the cities who would not receive his disciples:

Matthew 10:14-15 (NASB)

¹⁴ Whoever does not receive you, nor heed your words, as you go out of that house or that city, shake the dust off your feet. ¹⁵ Truly I say to you, it will be more tolerable for *the* land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city.

By the way – when Jesus mentions “Sodom and Gomorrah” here – to follow the *interpretational constant* we talked about in the introduction – we need to realize that Jesus’ reference of these cities was an emphasis on God’s judgement on them for their sins – and rejection of Him... What sins were Sodom and Gomorrah known for?... Well, needless to say for centuries one of those sins was called “sodomy” – a term borrowed from the name of the city... Today in our culture – this sin is being celebrated and being forced upon you – not only for your acceptance of the lifestyle but for you to also celebrate and endorse such practices as right and normal... And if you fail to do so – you will see what an enemy truly is...

For those who say that Jesus never condemned homosexuality – they need to re-read their Bibles... Jesus’ reference of Sodom and Gomorrah was not in support of them but as an illustration of God’s just condemnation and judgment – and even saying that those who reject His disciples who carry the gospel – will be treated even worse in God’s final judgment...

The Apostle Paul was inspired to write to the Thessalonians a word of encouragement to endure the persecution that was coming from the enemies of God... He too affirms God’s vindication of His true friends.

2 Thessalonians 1:6-8 (NASB)

⁶ For after all it is *only* just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, ⁷ and *to give* relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, ⁸ dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

We will not belabor this point – since last week’s message was almost entirely about this truth – but we do acknowledge that the book of Obadiah teaches that God is the Judge of all who are proud and who oppose His people...

The Friends of God are God’s Personal People.

The Friends of God have God’s Promised Vindication

3. The Friends of God are God’s Permanent Possession

Here in Obadiah, the nation of Israel had fallen under God’s judgment, but God was not finished with them yet. Though they too suffered, their future would be different than the Edomites.

In a reversal of fortunes for Israel and Edom, the Lord speaks:

¹⁷ “But on Mount Zion there will be those who escape,
And it will be holy.

And the house of Jacob will possess their possessions.

¹⁸ “Then the house of Jacob will be a fire

And the house of Joseph a flame;

But the house of Esau *will be* as stubble.

And they will set them (the people of Esau) on fire and consume them (the people of Esau),

So that there will be no survivor of the house of Esau,”

For the LORD has spoken.

Among God’s Words of judgment against Edom – God also speaks words of hope for His people... Not only would the wicked receive justice, God’s people would be restored.

When God’s children experience suffering and pain – it causes us to lean into the Lord even more... When we do – it leads to our greater understanding of the depth and breadth of God’s love and grace... We learn to depend on Him more completely...

Leslie Wall recently reminded me of a great statement made by –

Charles Haddon Spurgeon – “I have learned to kiss the waves that throw me up against the Rock of Ages”

Our trials teach us of the hopelessness of all those other things we tend to put our trust in... Trials are designed by God to teach us to trust in Christ, God’s Son, who makes us God’s friends...

As Jesus said to his disciples:

John 15:14-15 (NASB)

¹⁴ You are My friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.

So here in Obadiah, God gives His people hope even in the midst of their despair... He speaks in terms, as if promising to bring them back to life from the dead...

Indeed, in these final verses, God promises His people that they will return from exile and regain their lost lands:

¹⁹ Then *those of the Negev* (South country) will possess the mountain of Esau,
And *those of the Shephelah* (the foothills) the Philistine *plain*;
Also, possess the territory of Ephraim and the territory of Samaria,
And Benjamin *will possess* Gilead.

²⁰ And the exiles of this host of the sons of Israel,
Who are *among* the Canaanites as far as Zarephath,
And the exiles of Jerusalem who are in Sepharad
Will possess the cities of the Negev.

²¹ The deliverers will ascend Mount Zion
To judge the mountain of Esau... (:19-21a).

The places mentioned here are certainly unfamiliar to us – but we at least need to see that God is promising that He will make Mount Zion holy again and He will dwell with His people again...

In one sense, these promises were fulfilled within a few decades, when a number of the Israelites returned from the exile in Babylon to the land of Judah...

But Obadiah also pictures a resurrected kingdom – that will include all of God’s people... That’s why we see him reference the “house of Joseph”. The house of Joseph was a part of the northern kingdom that had been scattered among the nations about 150 years earlier...

The main fulfillment of Obadiah’s prophecy was not experienced by Ezra or Nehemiah when they each lead large numbers back from exiles to Jerusalem... Rather – God’s words through Obadiah will be ultimately fulfilled when God’s people are in God’s place under God’s rule through the Lord Jesus Christ...

For those who are in Christ – there are great blessings that we will not only enjoy one day – but we can enjoy today!... There is deliverance – the promise of inheritance – God’s justice – God’s Word – and God’s undeserved love!...

As God’s people in His church, we have already begun to experience these blessings from God... God’s friends are His own special people, set apart in Christ to enjoy the blessings that we enjoy!

... So once again I ask you – are you friend of God?... If not, you can become one... repent of your pride and any sin you cling to. Call on the Lord Jesus to make you one of His own...

Questions to consider in CG:

- One Bible study method was talked about in the introduction to the message. It is *interpretational constants* – which refers to the use of certain names, figures, or metaphors that, once used to symbolize a thing, seem to maintain that representation throughout the Bible. For example; oil is used symbolically in Scripture as a picture of the Holy Spirit. Wine was often used as a picture of joy, and leaven is always a picture of evil... Can you think of other such illustrations in Scripture that are used in this manner?

(For leaders to be prepared for this discussion, here is a quick list of many of them:

The rainbow: a symbol of God's covenant *See also* Ge 9:13; Eze 1:28; Rev 4:3

A stairway: a symbol of the way to God Ge 28:11-13; Jn 1:51

Thunder, lightning, cloud and smoke: symbols of God's majesty Ex 19:16-18; Ex 24:17; Ps 97:2,4; Rev 4:5; Rev 8:5; Rev 11:19

Thunder: a symbol of God's voice Ps 29:3; Ps 68:33

Trumpets: a symbol of God speaking Ex 19:19; Rev 8:6

The pillar of cloud and fire: a symbol of guidance Ex 13:21

A throne: a symbol of God's glory Isa 6:1; Eze 1:26; Rev 4:2; Rev 22:3

Dry bones: a symbol of spiritual death Eze 37:1-2,11

White hair: a symbol of wisdom Da 7:9; Rev 1:14

The wind: a symbol of the Holy Spirit Jn 3:8; Ac 2:2

Fire: a symbol of the Holy Spirit Ac 2:3

Stars and lampstands: symbols of God's ministers Rev 1:20

A signet ring: a symbol of authority Est 8:10; Hag 2:23

Arrows: symbols of God's judgments Ps 38:2; Ps 120:4

A sceptre: a symbol of God's rule Ps 2:9; Rev 2:27; Rev 19:15

The capstone: a symbol of pre-eminence Mt 21:42 pp Mk 12:10-11 pp Lk 20:17; Ps 118:22

A rock: a symbol of stability Ps 18:2; Ps 40:2

The human body: a symbol of interdependence 1Co 12:27

Grass: a symbol of human frailty Ps 90:5-6; 1Pe 1:24

Symbolic creatures

The serpent: a symbol of Satan's subtlety Ge 3:1; Rev 12:9; Rev 20:1-3

Locusts: a symbol of God's judgment Ex 10:12; Joel 1:4; Rev 9:3

Beasts: symbols of earthly kingdoms Da 7:2-7,17; Da 8:20-22

A dove: a symbol of the Holy Spirit Mt 3:16 pp Mk 1:10 pp Lk 3:22

A lamb: a symbol of Jesus Christ's sacrifice Rev 5:6

Symbolic actions

Breaking a jar: a symbol of the destruction of Jerusalem Jer 19:10-11

The cursing of a fig-tree: a symbol of judgment Mt 21:18-19 pp Mk 11:12-14

Washing hands: a symbol of innocence Mt 27:24

Being thirsty: a symbol of spiritual need Ps 63:1; Jn 7:37

Baptism: a symbol of salvation in Jesus Christ Ac 22:16; Ro 6:3-4; 1Pe 3:21

The Lord's Supper: a symbol of union with Christ Mt 26:26-29 pp Mk 14:22-24 pp Lk 22:19-20 pp 1Co 11:23-26

Anointing: a symbol of empowering by God's Spirit 1Sa 16:13; Lk 4:18; Isa 61:1

Harvesting: a symbol of judgment day Joel 3:12-13; Mt 13:29-30; Rev 14:15

Tearing garments: a symbol of anger and sorrow Ge 37:29,34; Jos 7:6

Spitting: a symbol of contempt Isa 50:6; Mt 26:67 pp Mk 14:65

Shaking off dust: a symbol of rejection Mt 10:14 pp Lk 9:5; Ac 13:51

Sitting in sackcloth and ashes: a symbol of repentance Ps 69:11; Isa 22:12; Jnh 3:5-6; Mt 11:21

Lifting of hands: a symbol of prayer Ps 63:4; 1Ti 2:8

Covering the head: a symbol of submission 1Co 11:3-10

Symbols expressing God's nature and character

God's face: a symbol of his presence Nu 6:25-26; Ps 34:16

God's arm or hand: a symbol of his power Ps 21:8; Ps 89:13

God's eyes: a symbol of his awareness Pr 15:3; 1Pe 3:12

God's ear: a symbol of God listening Ps 31:2; Isa 59:1)

- What does it mean for God to refer to His people as "My people"? How should that phrase affect His people?
- The Second major point in the message had to do with God's promise to "vindicate His people" – the God promises to judge those who persecute His people. How does this truth help God people now? Should a Christian

rejoice in the fact that others will be facing God's judgment? How should Christians relate to this truth?

- What does it mean to be God's "permanent" possession? What impact should this truth have upon Christians?
- What are your thoughts about the C. H. Spurgeon quote – *"I have learned to kiss the waves that throw me up against the Rock of Ages"*?
- Near the end of the message, pastor said: "For those who are in Christ – there are great blessings that we will not only enjoy one day – but we can enjoy today!... There is deliverance – the promise of inheritance – God's justice – God's Word – and God's undeserved love!"... What other "blessings" of God should Christians be "enjoying" now – not just waiting to enjoy when we get to heaven?