

Unit 17

God Restores His People

Ezra; Prophets

Memory Verse

“And I will put this third into the fire, and refine them as one refines silver, and test them as gold is tested. They will call upon my name, and I will answer them. I will say, ‘They are my people’; and they will say, ‘The LORD is my God.’”

—ZECHARIAH 13:9

The Vision of Future Justice

SESSION IN A SENTENCE: God remembers sin and one day will judge the world and deliver His people.

BACKGROUND PASSAGE: Obadiah

In 2006, a song no one expected hit the airwaves: a new song from Johnny Cash, who had died three years earlier. But this was not “Ring of Fire” or “Folsom Prison Blues.” A cover of a traditional folk song, this recording was like nothing heard before by an entire generation familiar mostly with the faux-angst and sugary vacuousness of modern pop music. It was something else entirely, something weightier—a word to sinners, a lament, and a warning. Cash, in the role of world-worn prophet, crooned, “You can run on for a long time / Run on for a long time / Run on for a long time / Sooner or later, God’ll cut you down.”¹ It’s almost impossible not to get chills listening to the song as Cash issues this dire warning.

 Share about a time when you heard a warning in an unexpected place. What was it, and why did it resonate with you?

Group Time

Point 1: The Lord will confront the boasts of an arrogant heart (Obad. 1-4).

¹ The vision of Obadiah. Thus says the Lord GOD concerning Edom: We have heard a report from the LORD, and a messenger has been sent among the nations: “Rise up! Let us rise against her for battle!” ² Behold, I will make you small among the nations; you shall be utterly despised. ³ The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rock, in your lofty dwelling, who say in your heart, “Who will bring me down to the ground?” ⁴ Though you soar aloft like the eagle, though your nest is set among the stars, from there I will bring you down, declares the LORD.

Obadiah delivered his message during a dark time in Israel’s history, most likely after the Babylonian exile. Jerusalem was in ruins, and only a handful of people remained. But the Edomites felt no remorse over the fall of Judah. The Edomites, the descendants of Esau—Jacob’s older brother—rejoiced in their downfall. There was a perverse delight in Judah and Israel getting what they deserved.



Think about a time when you saw someone you viewed as an opponent or enemy fall (e.g., a coworker, celebrity, or politician). How did you feel when you heard what happened, and why?

God directly confronted the attitude at the heart of Edom’s response to Judah’s situation—Edom’s arrogance. Edom believed they were untouchable, like a soaring eagle, but their arrogance deceived them. Rather than letting Edom’s arrogance stand, God was personally active in cutting them down to size, causing nations to rise up and war against Edom. God was going to bring them down, and nothing could stop it.



Voices from Church History

“A man in every sin aims to set up his own will as his rule, and his own glory as the end of his actions against the will and glory of God; and could a sinner attain his end, God would be destroyed.”²

—Stephen Charnock
(c. 1628-1680)

Point 2: The Lord will remember Edom's failure to help His people in their time of distress (Obad. 10-14).

¹⁰ Because of the violence done to your brother Jacob, shame shall cover you, and you shall 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 gates and cast lots for Jerusalem, you were like one of them. ¹² But do not gloat over the day of your brother in the day of his misfortune; do not rejoice over the people of Judah in the day of their ruin; do not boast in the day of distress. ¹³ Do not enter the gate of my people in the day of their calamity; do not gloat over his disaster in the day of his calamity; do not loot his wealth in the day of his calamity. ¹⁴ Do not stand at the crossroads to cut off his fugitives; do not hand over his survivors in the day of distress.

God's judgment was promised and one day came to Edom, just as it had come to Judah. This prompts us to consider how we should respond to displays of God's judgment: We can respond **arrogantly**, as the Edomites did, or we can respond **humbly**. Obviously, we should opt for humility, and these *three truths* encourage us in this direction:

- 1) *God was right to judge Judah as He did.*
- 2) *God was also right to judge Edom as He did.*
- 3) *God is still right in His judgment of people who persist in their sin today.*



Why are we prone to gloat over the downfall of our enemies?

Our response to God's judgment doesn't stop with our attitude. Our attitude influences, if not outright determines, our actions. So we must carefully consider the ways in which we can respond to judgment. Edom took advantage of the survivors of Judah's judgment, and for their lack of compassion, Edom is no more. Christians should learn from this lesson and act for the good of all humanity and the glory of God.

Social Concern: All Christians are under obligation to seek to make the _____ of _____ supreme in our own lives and in _____.

Point 3: The Lord will judge the nations and deliver His people on the day of the Lord (Obad. 15-21).

¹⁵ For the day of the LORD is near upon all the nations. As you have done, it shall be done to you; your deeds shall return on your own head. ¹⁶ For as you have drunk on my holy mountain, so all the nations shall drink continually; they shall drink and swallow, and shall be as though they had never been. ¹⁷ But in Mount Zion there shall be those who escape, and it shall be holy, and the house of Jacob shall possess their own possessions. ¹⁸ The house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau stubble; they shall burn them and consume them, and there shall be no survivor for the house of Esau, for the LORD has spoken.

The Book of Obadiah is a warning of coming judgment but also a message of compassion. One reason is the judgment on Edom, and the nations, would demonstrate **God's compassion for His people**, revealing once again that God is gracious and just. The second reason is God's warning was also a message of **compassion for the Edomites and the nations**, an opportunity to turn away from their sin before it was too late.

God Is Just: Since humanity has sinned by failing to live up to God's righteous standards, God has taken it upon Himself to make _____ by being both just and the justifier of those who place their faith in _____.



How are you encouraged knowing that God is both gracious and just?

¹⁹ Those of the Negeb shall possess Mount Esau, and those of the Shephelah shall possess the land of the Philistines; they shall possess the land of Ephraim and the land of Samaria, and Benjamin shall possess Gilead. ²⁰ The exiles of this host of the people of Israel shall possess the land of the Canaanites as far as Zarephath, and the exiles of Jerusalem who are in Sepharad shall possess the cities of the Negeb. ²¹ Saviors shall go up to Mount Zion to rule Mount Esau, and the kingdom shall be the LORD's.

These last verses are steeped in the hope that we have in the gospel because they find their ultimate fulfillment in **Christ**. Jesus is the great ruler and deliverer of His people past, present, and future. Jesus is the Lord to whom the kingdom belongs. And Jesus will bring about the final restoration of His people, even beyond the promised land. All of creation will be made new, and we will dwell in the kingdom with Jesus forever.

Daily Study

Day 1: Read Obadiah 1-21

It's hard to imagine that there's much good news for us in an obscure book of the Bible like Obadiah. Tucked away in the Minor Prophets, it is the least read book of the Bible.⁴ But through its warnings against the arrogance of Edom and the hope of restoration present in its pages, it reminds us of an important truth: "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

God inspired every page of the Bible, and every word is meant for our good and growth in godliness. That includes Obadiah, which powerfully points us to God's compassion and mercy even as it condemns the sinful deeds of the arrogant. Every word of Scripture points us to the good news of the gospel, showing us the reason for the hope we have in Christ. May it never be said of us that we left a page of Scripture unturned and missed an opportunity to glory in Christ. Instead, let us rejoice in every word, and feast on every page as we see Jesus on every page—even the obscure ones like the Book of Obadiah.



What books of the Bible do you struggle to read? Why?

Day 2: Read Jeremiah 49:7-22

Obadiah's was not the only warning against Edom's arrogance. Jeremiah's prophecy was also a strong condemnation of their evil. But God didn't stop with condemnation—He also called them to turn and run back! This is an example of God's compassion toward sinners. Because He desires that people repent and be saved, He calls for us to flee from sin. He brings what is done in the darkness to light and then calls us to walk in that light (1 John 1:5-7).

God continues to do this today. As we read His Word, the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin. As we walk in relationship with other believers, we speak truth into one another's lives, and we carry one another's burdens as we pursue holiness. The conviction that comes in the moment is rarely comfortable. But the freedom that results from repentance is sweet.



Whom do you know who speaks difficult truth into your life?

Day 3: Read Obadiah 1-21

Edom and the nations had sinned against Judah and against God, and the Day of the Lord would come against them. But the promise of retribution was not the entirety of Obadiah's message. God also promised restoration for His people. He would make them holy. And greater still, He would come and establish His kingdom for all to see.

Imagine what it must have been like to hear these words the first time. God's people had never had a history of unfailing faithfulness. Throughout the Old Testament, God was continually calling His people to repentance, to turn away from the sin that ensnared them. The situation they found themselves in was the fruit of years of rebellion against God. Yet even as He disciplined them, God had not abandoned them. He would restore His people, and better still, ultimately He would establish His rule over all the nations.



How does God's call to repentance challenge you today?

Day 4: Read Psalm 137:1-9

The people of Israel had been devastated by the Babylonians. Jerusalem was burned to the ground. The temple was ruined. The people were murdered, and those who were kept alive were taken as slaves. And through it all, the Babylonians—who had been used as instruments of judgment against God’s wayward people—rejoiced. They delighted in the destruction they caused. But despite his harsh language, the psalmist was not wishing for vengeance in human terms. He was praying for God’s justice. He was putting his trust in God’s promise to repay the Babylonians for what they had done. He was trusting that God would deliver His people, just as He had promised. Throughout this psalm, the psalmist called the people to remember: Remember Jerusalem in your grief—and remember the Lord’s promise of deliverance.



How are you able to remain hopeful when God seems indifferent?

Day 5: Read Obadiah 1-21

As much as Obadiah is a book about sin and judgment, it is also one of hope. And as believers today, we have an even greater hope reading it because we have seen the promise begin to come to fruition in Jesus. When Jesus—the Son of God Himself—began His earthly ministry, He declared, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15). He came proclaiming “the gospel of God” (1:14) and performing signs and wonders. He went to the cross and died in place of sinners and was raised again from death. And God gave Him power and authority over all creation, and every knee “in heaven and on earth and under the earth” is commanded to bow before Him and “confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:9-11).



How does the gospel give you hope today?

Encourage One Another

Join together with 2-4 people from your group, or with your family, sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and you are responding.

Share your thoughts and reflections on the truths from Scripture in this session:

- The Lord will confront the boasts of an arrogant heart (Obad. 1-4).
- The Lord will remember Edom's failure to help His people in their time of distress (Obad. 10-14).
- The Lord will judge the nations and deliver His people on the day of the Lord (Obad. 15-21).



How have you responded to these truths from Scripture?



What effect does the prospect of God's judgment have on your attitude?



What have you learned from non-Christians when talking with them about the concept of God's judgment?

Notes

UNIT 16**SESSION 1**

1. H. A. Ironside, *Daniel: An Ironside Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1920, reprint 2005), 35.
2. Joni Eareckson Tada, *A Place of Healing* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2010), 70.

SESSION 2

1. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperOne, 1980), 124.
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SESSION 3

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CHRISTMAS SESSION

1. Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African*, vol. 2 (London: 1789), 159.
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UNIT 17**SESSION 1**

1. Johnny Cash, "God's Gonna Cut You Down," *American V: A Hundred Highways* (Santa Monica, CA: American, 2006).
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3. Robert Murray McCheyne, in *The Works of the Late Rev. Robert Murray McCheyne*, vol. 2 (New York: Robert Carter, 1847), 179-80.
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SESSION 2

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2. A. W. Tozer, *Worship: The Reason We Were Created—Collected Insights from A. W. Tozer* (Chicago: Moody, 2017) [eBook].

SESSION 3

1. Elisabeth Elliot, *On Asking God Why* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 1989), 142.
2. Yoiyah Yilpet, "Haggai," in *Africa Bible Commentary*, gen. ed. Tokunboh Adeyemo (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 1102.
3. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Meditations on Psalms*, ed. and trans. Edwin Robertson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 72.

SESSION 4

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UNIT 18**SESSION 1**

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SESSION 4

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The Gospel Project®

Adult Daily Discipleship Guide ESV
Volume 8, Number 2 Winter 2019-20

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Printed in the United States of America

The Gospel Project®: *Adult Daily Discipleship Guide*
ESV (ISSN 2330-9393; Item 005573553) is
published quarterly by LifeWay Christian Resources,
One LifeWay Plaza, Nashville, TN 37234.
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Answers to Learn Truth*

Think about the encouragement people often share to help others through times of adversity. We might hear someone speak of how pressure is required to transform coal into a diamond; thus, pressure can be good for us, transforming us into someone better. Or we might be told of the hatchling that has to work to break through its eggshell, and that struggle is good for this creature—even necessary—so that it grows strong. Likewise, adversity strengthens us and positions us to be who we were meant to be.

While these illustrations might provide encouragement, they reveal something quite important about the world's view of adversity. The world sees adversity as an opportunity for a person to dig deep, gaze within their soul, and discover who he or she truly is. But the gospel tells a different story—a better story. The gospel sees adversity as an opportunity for a person to look high above, gaze upon Christ, and see who He truly is. For it is Christ, not ourselves, who carries us through all trials and suffering. Adversity positions us to rely on Christ's power, not an inner human strength that has been lying dormant.

In this volume we pick up the story of Scripture with the Jews living in bondage in a foreign land, the result of their rebellion against God. But even in the midst of judgment, God's faithful love still shines forth brightly. We will witness God continuing to guide, strengthen, and protect His people in their time of great adversity, not to help them discover who they were but rather to understand who He is. At the same time, we will see God continue to drive the events of history toward the fulfillment of His ancient promise to provide the Rescuer, the One who would free people from an even greater bondage, that of sin and death.