



## DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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### **Obadiah: Bad Blood**

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We are continuing our summer sermon series, Majoring in the Minors. How many people spend their lives majoring in the minor things of life! By us spending time studying what scholars call the “minor prophets,” we hear words that call us to anything but spending our lives majoring in the minors. Prophets in the Bible don’t predict the future. Rather, they hear the cries in the night. They’re not foretellers, but forth tellers of God’s truth. We’ve looked at Hosea, Joel, and Amos. Today we read the prophesy of Obadiah, the shortest book in the Hebrew Scriptures, our Old Testament. Obadiah—talk about where the pages of your Bible stick together! I was at Promise Keepers in East Lansing on Friday, and did you know not one of the speakers quoted Obadiah! Oh, well. Obadiah’s prophesy was given to the Edomites, a tiny nation neighboring Judah. The first 16 verses are yet another judgment, this time of Edom. The last 5 verses are about the restoration of God. Believe it or not, you’ve seen Edom. Presently it is occupied by Jordan, just southeast of the Dead Sea. Its capital city is literally hewn in rock. If you saw the movie “Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade” I know you saw it. Obadiah means “Servant of God”. We don’t know any more about this prophet. He likely wrote just after Jerusalem was attacked and taken by Babylon, in about 580 BC. Hear these words of God:

*1:1 The vision of Obadiah. This is what the Sovereign LORD says about Edom-- We have heard a message from the LORD: An envoy was sent to the nations to say, "Rise, and let us go against her for battle"— 2 "See, I will make you small among the nations; you will be utterly despised. 3 The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rocks and make your home on the heights, you who say to yourself, 'Who can bring me down to the ground?' 4 Though you soar like the eagle and make your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down," declares the LORD. 5 "If thieves came to you, if robbers in the night-- Oh, what a disaster awaits you-- would they not steal only as much as they wanted? If grape pickers came to you, would they not leave a few grapes? 6 But how Esau will be ransacked, his hidden treasures pillaged! (It never really contained the holy grail). 7 All your allies will force you to the border; your friends will deceive and overpower you; those who eat your bread will set a trap for you, but you will not detect it. (I know for some of you it sounds like your office. Welcome to the real world). 8 "In that day," declares the LORD, "will I not destroy the wise men of Edom, men of understanding in the mountains of Esau? 9 Your warriors, O Teman, will be terrified, and everyone in Esau's mountains will be cut down in the slaughter. 10 Because of the violence against your brother Jacob, you will be covered with shame; you will be destroyed forever. 11 On the day you stood aloof while strangers carried off his wealth and foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem, you were like one of them. 12 You should not look down on your brother in the day of his misfortune, nor rejoice over the people of Judah in the day of their destruction, nor boast so much in the day of their trouble. 13 You should not march through the gates of my people in the day of their disaster, nor look down on them in their calamity in the day of their disaster, nor seize their wealth in the day of their disaster. 14 You should not wait at the crossroads to cut down their fugitives, nor hand over their survivors in the day of their trouble. 15 The day of the LORD is near for all nations. As you have done, it will be done to you; your deeds will return upon your own head. 16 Just as you drank on my holy hill, so all the nations will drink continually; they will drink and drink and be as if they had never been. 17 But on Mount Zion will be deliverance; it will be holy, and the house of Jacob will possess its inheritance. 18 The house of Jacob will be a fire and the house of Joseph a flame; the house of Esau will be stubble, and they will set it on fire and consume it. There will be no survivors from the house of Esau." The LORD has spoken. 19 People from the Negev will occupy the mountains of Esau, and people from the foothills will possess the land of the Philistines. They will occupy the fields of Ephraim and Samaria, and Benjamin will possess Gilead. 20 This company of Israelite exiles who are in Canaan will possess the land as far as Zarephath; the exiles from Jerusalem who are in Sepharad will possess the towns of the Negev. 21 Deliverers will go up on Mount Zion to govern the mountains of Esau. And the kingdom will be the LORD's.*

When I first read Obadiah, I thought it was about God getting even with the Edomites for mocking the Jews, selling them out when the large nations came through, denying them asylum, rejoicing when they were taken over, and how in spite of all that, God was going to gather the exiles home, give them the abundance of the land, and allow them to rule in His mercy and justice. On the surface, Obadiah reminds the people that God is still in control of the nations of the world, and His will is still carried through, sometimes despite appearances. It shows what happens to those who reject God's Word and His grace, rebelling in foolish pride. It's echoed in the New Testament in Galatians 6:7 "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows." It underscores the fact of God's judgment. If you respond in obedience to God, you have everything to gain. If you reject His grace in your pride, you have everything to lose. That could be you or me. It's powerful, all right.

Then I studied the Edomites. Edom was the nation of descendants of Esau—the twin brother of Jacob, first-born son of Isaac and Rebekah, grandson of father Abraham and Sarah. 11 of the first 50 chapters of the Bible tell the story of Jacob and Esau. Esau was a man's man: an outdoorsman, strong, handsome, and athletic. He also sold his birthright for lentil soup. Like a lot of us, men especially, Esau was the ultimate sucker for immediate gratification. Esau chose to forget about centering his life around anything, let alone God. He never realized, every decision you make doesn't just affect you; every decision leaves a legacy. It affects those around you; let alone your family; your future legacy; and the rest of the Body of Christ—the church. Esau's inclination led to self-centered descendants, angry and arrogant people who desired vengeance over Jacob's descendants. For centuries the Edomites gloated over the misfortunes of the Jews.

The roots of this struggle between Edom and Judah can be traced to this relationship between Esau and Jacob. You may remember that they struggled in Rebekeh's womb. Then Esau gave his birthright to Jacob for some stew. Then Jacob deceived Isaac and received his blessing instead of Esau. Then they met several more times. But listen to what happens afterward, because every decision you make doesn't just affect you; every decision leaves a legacy.

You remember the story: Jacob wrestles with God and his name is changed to Israel. He has 12 sons, one of whom was Joseph, who gets the Hebrew people to Egypt. Then, 400 years later the Hebrews are enslaved by Pharaoh, and Moses leads the people out of Egypt. When the Hebrews left Egypt under Moses, the Edomites brought out a huge army and denied Israel passage through their lands (Num. 20:14-20). Moses avoided a battle with these cousins and had to take a lengthy route around their nation. Then the Israelites fought against the Edomites under King Saul and King David. The Edomites were conquered, but after Israel became 2 nations (Israel in the north and Judah in the south), Edom broke away from Judah and fought against her at every turn. Psalm 137 recounts how Edom cheered the Babylonians on when Jerusalem fell. Edom itself was overtaken and destroyed a few years after Jerusalem fell.

Talk about bad blood! Here are these blood brothers—twins, no less, whose lives led to nothing but pride, treachery, and destruction, rather than humility and loyalty to each other and to God. The lesson is clear: destructive rivalry, comparison, and competition can make you lose perspective and sabotage your own activities. If your lives are not centered on God, there's nothing but bad blood. What long lasting good could come from it? I know this may be painful for you. You may be one among many here this morning who are on bad terms with your brother or sister or neighbor. Obadiah reminds us: All our relationships will be judged.

- Not by the merit of the other person.
- Not by whether we like them or not.
- Not by what their situation is.

But our relationships will be judged according to who God is.

- We are just because God is just with us.
- We love because God first loved us.
- We make sacrifices for each other, because God sacrifices himself for us.

- We humble ourselves, make peace with one another, forgive each other, encourage each other, pray for one another, bless each other, because we worship the living God who does these things for us.

Not because we deserve it, but because of who God is. You may be holding a grudge. You may have every right to react to your situation the way you are. But maybe it's time to fix it, for no other reason than because that's who God is. God is waiting to help you with your bad blood. How? Forgiveness, healing, communication, transformation. You know, *not* acting is often our greatest sin. Sometimes the worst violence we can commit is lack of involvement. Verse 11 and 12 say "*On the day you stood aloof... You should not look down on your brother in the day of his misfortune*". Obadiah is saying we are responsible for our inaction, our apathy. (This gets tricky as our world gets smaller.) As Americans who have been so blessed, we need to pray for the ability and will to act for the good of people and nations, rather than insulate ourselves in apathy and indifference toward others.

To take Obadiah's message one step further, Esau and Jacob stand for 2 opposing forces—the flesh and the Spirit. Esau was a good-looking, active, healthy, outgoing, athletic. Jacob was a homebody, full of deceit and selfish plans. If you were choosing, you would have chosen Esau. But God chose Jacob. In the Old Testament, He is known as "The God of Jacob." This shows God's grace. Jacob didn't deserve it over Esau. Salvation is not by merit; it is by grace and grace alone. God used Jacob to father the tribes of Israel. Esau's pride kept him from being used by God. Obadiah writes in verse 3 "*The pride of your heart has deceived you.*"

Pride. The oldest *sin* on the face of the earth. The sin of Adam and Eve. We minimize pride today. We talk about hate, terrorism, and war. We talk about sexual sins. We've talked about gossip. We even talk about injustice and disparity of wealth, like we have these "top 10" lists of abominable sins. But listen...believer or unbeliever—the worst sin we can commit before God is the sin of pride. Pride: the sin that turned Lucifer the angel into Satan the deceiver. Pride: the sin that depopulated the very realm of heaven. Pride: the sin that emptied the beautiful, peaceful, perfect Garden of Eden. Pride: the sin that brought the Savior to the cross and made him bleed and die as a necessity for forgiveness. Pride: the sin that keeps your heart hardened and closed to the salvation of God and keeps you bound on a road of isolation, easy, false fixes, and death. An Irish preacher said it: Pride is the sin that populates hell.

And if pride was the first sin, the first murder was of a brother. And by the time Obadiah prophesies, pride's ugly little seed grown and borne its evil fruit to nations, apathy, terrorism, and death. Satan has forever tried to thwart God's plan of salvation. Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, it seems like the lineage leading to Jesus Christ's life was in peril of being destroyed because of bad blood. The devil, the prince of this world wants the blood of the church of God. And it continues in the New Testament. Did you know that there were Edomites in the New Testament? All the Herods were Edomites. The first Herod killed all the Jewish baby boys in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:16-18). All his worldly power could not prevent God's plan of salvation through Jesus. Then there was Herod who took the head of John the Baptist (Matthew 14:1-13). And then there is the later Herod and he's killing James the brother of John, because he's preaching the message of the Spirit (Acts 12:1-24).

It's really the battle between the flesh and the Spirit. The flesh can bring nothing to you. Galatians reminds us that the flesh wars against the Spirit. Only the Spirit fills you and brings righteousness and a Godly legacy—in your family, at your workplace, and at church. The bad news is this ancient war is continuing in my own heart, and within your soul too. The good news is, as Paul declares to the Christ followers in Corinth, "*we have the victory through Jesus Christ*" (1 Cor. 15:57). If we walk in His Spirit, we shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh.

It's an eternal battle. It's a historical battle. It's a contemporary battle. And it's a very personal battle. Have you submitted to God? Once, someone asked "Why does D.L. Moody have such a monopoly of the Holy Spirit?, and the man rightly turned around to him and said "Sir, you couldn't be further from the truth. The Holy Spirit has a monopoly of D.L. Moody." What about you? How much does God have of you?

Judgment is simply the flipside of salvation. It provides a sense of urgency in relation to God. Look at the cross. It reminds us of our sin and the death penalty that goes with it. It is also an invitation to us to believe in the mercy of God, and the doorway to His new, resurrection life. It's an eternal battle. It's a historical battle. It's a contemporary battle. And it's a very personal battle. As Obadiah, Joel, Amos, and Hosea have prophesied, one day "The kingdom will be the Lord's." Have you claimed His victory?