

The Vision of Future Justice

Summary and Goal

In the Book of Obadiah, we find a warning that God remembers sin and that a day is coming when He will judge the world. In this session, we will see that even as God judges sin, He makes a way for the deliverance of His people through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, whereby He no longer holds our sin against us.

Because we have received God's grace and mercy by faith in Jesus, we are to have compassion and concern for the oppressed and distressed in our culture as we share the gospel with them and even with those who take advantage of them.

Session Outline

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

Background Passage: Obadiah

Session in a Sentence

God remembers sin and one day will judge the world and deliver His people.

Christ Connection

The prophet Obadiah was given a vision of the day of the Lord. On that day Edom and the nations would be judged for their sins and Israel would be delivered and live securely in the land. Through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, all those who trust in Christ are spared from judgment and can live securely, knowing they have been delivered from sin and death.

Missional Application

Because we have received God's grace and mercy, we are to have compassion and concern for the oppressed and distressed in our culture.

Group Time

GROUP MEMBER CONTENT

Group content found in the Daily Discipleship Guide is included in this shaded area throughout the session.

Introduction

EXPLAIN: Use the paragraph in the DDG (p. 57) about the Johnny Cash song “God’s Gonna Cut You Down” to broach the subject of the impending, unavoidable day of judgment. You might consider playing the song for your group as they arrive.

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.

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.



Share about a time when you heard a warning in an unexpected place. What was it, and why did it resonate with you? *(be prepared to give an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)*

SAY: Cash’s weary words are an echo of an older warning found throughout Scripture, especially from the prophets in the Old Testament. They warn that we can try to run from God, deny that He exists, indulge in all the pleasures and comforts of the world, rejoice in the downfall of enemies, and boast that we will never fall, but in the end, no matter our vice and regardless of our swagger, “sooner or later, God’ll cut you down.”

SUMMARIZE: This is the message we find in the Book of Obadiah, a warning that God remembers sin and that a day is coming when He will judge the world. In this session, we will see that even as God judges sin, He makes a way for the deliverance of His people through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, whereby He no longer holds our sin against us. Because we have received God’s grace and mercy by faith in Jesus, we are to have compassion and concern for the oppressed and distressed in our culture as we share the gospel with them and even with those who take advantage of them.

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

READ Obadiah 1-4 (DDG p. 58).

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.

EXPLAIN: Reference the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 58) as you provide the *present* and *historical context* for this passage and the tension between Israel/Judah and Edom.

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. Theirs was a perverse delight in Judah and Israel getting what they deserved.

Present Context:

- Both of the divided kingdoms were lost at this point. The Northern Kingdom of Israel’s people had long ago been sent into captivity by the Assyrians (722 BC). The Southern Kingdom of Judah had been sacked by Babylon, and their best and brightest had been carried away in chains to Babylon (605, 597, 586 BC). Only those considered too poor to be of any real value to the Babylonians remained.

Historical Context:

- Edom had long had a troubled relationship with Israel and Judah, going all the way back to the days of their ancestors, Esau and Jacob, respectively. The two brothers had battled one another from the womb (Gen. 25:22-23). As the elder brother, the family birthright belonged to Esau: the greater share of the inheritance, the position of honor within the family, and the blessing of his father. But he didn’t value these things until his scheming younger brother claimed them, fueling a murderous anger in Esau (Gen. 25:27-34; 27:1-45).
- Though Esau seems to have reconciled with his brother (Gen. 33), his prior bitterness toward Jacob was passed down through the generations, such as when Edom refused to allow the people of Israel safe passage through their land on their journey to the promised land (Num. 20:14-21). Later, Edom was conquered during David’s reign (2 Sam. 8:11-14), but they rebelled against numerous kings of Judah, as Isaac had said would happen when he gave Esau the only blessing he had to give (Gen. 27:40).

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question. (As you lead this discussion, try to keep everyone focused on their emotional responses, not the circumstances that prompted their emotional response. Do all you can to curb gossip. You may also identify opportunities for deeper one-on-one conversation, especially with those who have experienced difficult situations at work, school, or even in the church.)

 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? *(be prepared to give an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)*

EXPLAIN: Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 58) to comment on the reasons for Edom’s arrogance (**physical geography, treaties, human wisdom and strength**) and God’s plans to bring them down.

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)

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- The Edomites considered themselves naturally protected from invasion because of the **physical geography** of their homeland: elevated strongholds in the mountains (Obad. 3-4), but God would bring them down.
 - At God’s prompting, all the nations that had made **treaties** with Edom would turn around and pillage them (Obad. 6-7).
 - The **wise and strong ones of Edom** would fall, being unable to stand before the all-wise and all-powerful God who defends His people and judges His enemies (Obad. 8-9).
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SAY: There is, arguably, no vice hated more by God than arrogance. He hates and detests pride and arrogance (Prov. 8:13; 16:5). God hates arrogance the way that He hates idolatry because arrogance is idolatry—self-worship over the worship of the one true God.

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

READ Obadiah 10-14 (DDG p. 59).

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.

EXPLAIN: Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 59) to address our response to judgment with respect to the head and the heart. Show how the promise and eventuality of judgment for Edom should drive us to **humility**. Ground this response in *three truths* about God's right to judge His creatures for their sin.

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.*

- **Responding arrogantly to God's judgment.** When Judah fell, the Edomites rejoiced, gloated, and even mocked. Their response was born from arrogance, and that arrogance led to their destruction. Delighting in the downfall of another, mocking, gloating—all of these merely compound sin. Such arrogance does not glorify God, and God wants us to have nothing to do with such things.
- **Responding humbly to God's judgment.** Instead of responding from arrogance, God's judgment of *anyone* should humble us. Whether we experience it directly or we witness it, judgment is humbling. Three truths ground this as the proper response to God's judgment.
 - 1) *God was right to judge Judah as He did.* God warned Judah, and Israel, time and again of the consequences of their evil, but they would not listen (see Isa. 1; Jer. 10:1-16; Ezek. 23).
 - 2) *God was also right to judge Edom as He did.* Edom too was blind to their own sin. Their hearts were just as dead as Judah's. Their arrogance led to their destruction (Obad. 1-10).
 - 3) *God is still right in His judgment of people who persist in their sin today.* All of humanity, apart from Christ, is condemned in sin. All people have denied their Creator. Apart from the transforming work of Christ, we are just as dead in our sin as Judah and Edom (Rom. 3:23-24).

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.



Why are we prone to gloat over the downfall of our enemies? (we are prideful; we think they deserve punishment; we fail to see ourselves as deserving of punishment; we don't have the heart of God, who does not delight in the death of the wicked but delights in repentance and faith)

EXPLAIN: Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 59) to address our response to judgment with respect to our hands: We should respond to judgment with **compassion**.

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.

- Edom showed no **compassion** to Judah. They ignored the distress of the people who remained and stole the refugees' possessions. They even took survivors as slaves (Amos 1:6,9,11).
 - Today, many delight in the downfall of others who have sinned. Many callously turn a blind eye to the plight of others who suffer from the effects of sin, whether directly or indirectly. God does not ignore these sins any more than He ignored the sins of Edom. Cruelty, the fruit of arrogance, will be judged by God unless people turn from such sins to Christ in repentance and faith.
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FILL IN THE BLANKS: Provide group members with the answers for the call-out in their DDG (p. 59).

Social Concern: All Christians are under obligation to seek to make the **will** of **Christ** supreme in our own lives and in **human society**.

Essential Doctrine "Social Concern": All Christians are under obligation to seek to make the **will** of **Christ** supreme in our own lives and in **human society**. Means and methods used for the improvement of society and the establishment of righteousness among men can be truly and permanently helpful only when they are rooted in the regeneration of the individual by the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ. In the Spirit of Christ, Christians should oppose racism, every form of greed, selfishness, vice, and all forms of sexual immorality, including adultery, homosexuality, and pornography. We should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick. We should speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death. Every Christian should seek to bring industry, government, and society as a whole under the sway of the principles of righteousness, truth, and brotherly love. In order to promote these ends, Christians should be ready to work with all men of good will in any good cause, always being careful to act in the spirit of love without compromising their loyalty to Christ and His truth (Mic. 6:8; Eph. 6:5-9; 1 Thess. 3:12).

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

READ: Ask a volunteer to read Obadiah 15-18 (DDG p. 60).

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.

EXPLAIN: Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 60) to emphasize the **compassion** that God promised to show His people, as well as His **compassion** toward the Edomites and the nations implicit in His warning of judgment.

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.

- **Compassion for His people.** The survivors of Judah were cruelly mistreated by the Edomites, but God had not abandoned His people, despite their idolatry and sin. Nor would God ignore the sins of those He used to chasten them. He will uphold His righteousness, as He will be faithful to His covenant. That promise was with them throughout their exile in Babylon, their return to Jerusalem, and the centuries of rule by other nations. By God's compassion, they survived their own judgment and oppression, and the hope of restoration sustained them.
- **Compassion for the Edomites and the nations.** God made it crystal clear: Edom and all the nations were condemned in their sin and would experience the wrath of God. That hardly sounds like a compassionate message, until we consider the question of *why* it was shared. Was it just to make them live in terror? Only if God were petty and cruel. No, He had a greater purpose in mind. God warned Edom and the nations—and still warns all of us today—of the consequences of sin because He didn't want them to be condemned by their sins. He was giving them an opportunity to turn away from their sin before it was too late. And a remnant of Edom and the nations will indeed have taken that opportunity to be counted among the people of God and to bear His name (Amos 9:11-12).

FILL IN THE BLANKS: Provide group members with the answers for the call-out in their DDG (p. 60).

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 **provision** by being both just and the justifier of those who place their faith in **Christ**.

Essential Doctrine “God Is Just”: God establishes standards for His moral creatures that are in accordance with His righteousness, and His moral creatures will be judged according to those righteous standards (Lev. 11:44-45; Rom. 2:5-11; 2 Cor. 5:10). It would be an injustice if God were not to uphold His righteousness, for such a failure would require God to violate His own righteous character. Since humanity has sinned by failing to live up to God's righteous standards, God has taken it upon Himself to make **provision** by being both just and the justifier of those who place their faith in **Christ** (Rom. 3:25-26).

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.



How are you encouraged knowing that God is both gracious and just? (be prepared to give an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)

READ Obadiah 19-21 (DDG p. 60).

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.

EXPLAIN: Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 60) to establish the **Christ** connection in this passage.

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.

My Mission

EXPLAIN: Sometimes it is hard for us to find hope in the Prophets, but Obadiah offers so much good news, not just in the certainty of God’s judgment of evil but in the promise that God has made a way of deliverance. In Christ, we need not fear that “God will cut us down,” and we need not fear that God is indifferent to the sins of arrogant oppressors. Because Jesus has been raised from the dead and has authority, we can know for certain that God will not leave any wrongdoing unpunished. The proud will fall and the humble will be restored. But for now, we wait. We pray. We rejoice in having received His mercy. And as we do, we show His compassion and concern to all who are burdened and oppressed by their sins and the sins of others until the day He returns.

READ the following missional application statement in the DDG (p. 61), and encourage group members to choose at least one of the options below as a way to respond to the truth of God’s Word.

Because we have received God’s grace and mercy, we are to have compassion and concern for the oppressed and distressed in our culture.

- **How is God challenging you to obey in faith today through Obadiah’s message?**
- **What can your group do to show compassion to people who have been victimized or mistreated in your community?**
- **With whom will you share the gospel this week because of the reality of God’s judgment against arrogant sinners?**



Voices from Church History

“It was the view of that strange compassion of the Saviour, moving him to die for his enemies, to bear double for all our sins, to taste death for every man; it was this view which gave him the impulse in every labor, which made all suffering light to him, and every commandment not grievous.”³

—Robert Murray McCheyne (1813-1843)

CLOSE IN PRAYER: Our God and Father, You are righteous and promise to judge the nations in righteousness. Thank You for sparing us from the coming judgment we deserve by sending Your Son, Jesus, who endured the judgment for sin on our behalf. By the Holy Spirit, grant in us a compassionate heart toward our neighbors so that we might announce to them the mercy found in the gospel.

PACK ITEM 8: HYMN HANDOUT: Pass out copies of this hymn and sing it together.

INSTRUCT: As your group departs, encourage group members to read and respond to the **Daily Study** devotions in their DDG (pp. 62-64), which build and expand upon the group study. Also advocate for small groups or families to use **Encourage One Another** (p. 65) for mutual accountability and fellowship grounded upon the foundation of God’s Word.

Additional Commentary

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

“Edom’s pride was partly rooted in its unique location. The country was mountainous, with great sandstone cliffs providing natural security from attacks by others (3a). It was also wealthy because it was located on one of the great trade routes connecting Canaan in the west, Egypt in the south and Mesopotamia in the north. It was known to have many wise people (v. 8) and had developed great military strength. All of these blessings made Edom confident that no one could reach, attack or defeat it. The Lord, however, was not impressed by the Edomites’ pride in their power and prosperity and their boasting, *Who can bring me down?* (3b). Their power and pride are nothing before the power of the Lord. He can bring them down from their mighty position and reduce them to nothing by raising other nations to attack them (4).”⁴

“Obadiah’s prophecy focuses on Edom. Because of their location in the rugged mountains, the Edomites thought they were secure. Obadiah prophesied that Edom would be made small among the nations and would be utterly despised (Obad. 2). Obadiah further prophesied, ‘Because of the violence done to your brother Jacob, shame shall cover you, and you shall be cut off forever’ (v. 10). In the latter part of verse 18, he prophesied, ‘there shall be no survivor for the house of Esau [Edom], for the LORD has spoken.’ According to this verse, the ‘house of Jacob’ would destroy Edom. Early readers would certainly catch the message and tie it back to the twins born to Isaac and Rebekah: the house of Jacob would destroy the house of Esau. The twin brothers’ struggle indeed continued for centuries, long after their deaths.”⁵

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

“Just as Esau pursued Jacob (Genesis 27–33), so Edom did violence against Judah. And instead of coming to the aid of their brother Jacob, the Edomites acted like the foreign invaders (Babylonians). By having **cast lots for Jerusalem**, the Babylonians treated Jerusalem, Yahweh’s ‘holy mountain’ (Obad. 16), like a commodity to be contested (cf. Jer. 51:51; Joel 3:3; Nah. 3:10). **you shall be cut off forever**. Those who harm God’s people will eventually be destroyed. **On the day that you stood aloof ... you were like one of them** rebukes the Edomites, not for actively doing wrong but for failing to do right—i.e., for failing to give military support to neighboring Jerusalem when it was wrongly attacked.”⁶

“Three more prohibitions are given in verse 13. Babylon had battered down the gates of Jerusalem and entered to plunder the city (v. 11). Edom took advantage of Judah’s vulnerable position and entered (‘marched’ is the same verb translated ‘entered’ in v. 11) the city with the same evil intent. They gloated over (lit., ‘looked on,’ as in v. 12) Judah’s ‘calamity,’ greedy for their wealth. They chose a day of disaster for Judah to express their gloating attitude and to perform their greedy act. Three times in the verse the phrase ‘in the day of their disaster’ punctuates the account. The wordplay in the Hebrew text between the term translated ‘their disaster’ (*‘ēdām*) and Edom is lost in English translations. The point of the wordplay may be that what appeared to be a day of disaster for Israel would ultimately prove to be a day of disaster for Edom. When Edom looked upon Judah’s disaster, they were in effect looking into a mirror. Not only was Edom’s act barbarous and inhuman; not only was it treacherous; it was also sacrilege. When they entered the gates of ‘my people,’ they were violating God’s own possession by covenant. Judah was not just any people. They were special. They were the ‘apple of his eye’ (Deut. 32:10; Zech. 2:8), and God would not take lightly this violation on the part of foreigners or of Edom.”⁷

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

“Edom would be judged by the nations and then by the Lord Himself and by His people. The first (v. 8) and last (v. 15) mention of ‘Day’ by Obadiah refer to the time when the Lord will lash out against those who have betrayed His people ... Edom and all other nations who caused this suffering will feel the full force of God’s wrath in the period of time known as the **Day of the Lord**, which is a term frequently used by the prophets in reference to a time in history when God acts in a unique and spectacular way to show His glory (v. 15). Undoubtedly this reference is to the final day when all unbelievers will be judged. Obadiah speaks of a great reversal [vv. 17-21]. Israel and Judah will be reunited, and they will once again possess the land the Lord had promised them ... In the end, the kingdom of God will stand and endure forever [v. 21].”⁸

References

1. Johnny Cash, “God’s Gonna Cut You Down,” *American V: A Hundred Highways* (Santa Monica, CA: American, 2006).
2. Stephen Charnock, *Discourses upon the Existence and Attributes of God* (New York: Robert Carter and Brother, 1874), 94.
3. Robert Murray McCheyne, in *The Works of the Late Rev. Robert Murray McCheyne*, vol. 2 (New York: Robert Carter, 1847), 179-80.
4. Jesudason Baskar Jeyaraj, “Obadiah,” in *South Asia Bible Commentary*, gen. ed. Brian Wintle (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 1153.
5. George H. Shaddix, “Edom: Its Land and People,” *Biblical Illustrator* (Winter 2012-13): 69.
6. Paul R. Raabe, “Obadiah,” in *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 1681, n. 10-11.
7. Billy K. Smith and Franklin S. Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, vol. 19s in *The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2003) [Wordsearch].
8. Lauren Johnson, “Obadiah,” in *The Study Bible for Women* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2014), 1178, n. 15-16; n. 17-21; n. 21.