

SMALL GROUP GUIDE



OBADIĀH

THE DOWNFALL OF US ALL

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Everything started with a pig. In the middle of an unseasonably cold autumn day, Floyd Hatfield stole a prized hog from a man named Randolph McCoy. What happened next is a tragic page from American history. The two families began a famous feud in the rural valley between Kentucky and West Virginia. Punches were thrown. Bullets flew. People were murdered.

Ultimately, over a dozen members from the two feuding families died in the decade-long skirmish. Word of the small war made its way all the way to the Capitol of the United States. They declared that enough was enough. The Supreme Court pressed charges. The Hatfields were guilty of murder and disturbing the peace. One person was publicly executed, and another three were given life sentences in prison. All of this was started with a hog.

Today you can visit museums, reenactments, and even dinner shows that retell the story of the famous Hatfield and McCoy feud. While we can laugh at the foolishness of it all, we must not ignore the tragedy. Two sets of neighbors, united by faith and nationality, went to war with each other to tragic ends. People died and hearts were broken. Tragically, I would assume many of the casualties didn't even know why they were fighting. From the time they could talk, they were just taught to hate the other family.

Hatred is a learned trait. No child is born with prejudice; it's taught. Unfortunately, generational hatred is deeply ingrained into human history. Studying Obadiah, the shortest book in the Old Testament, puts this principle on display. Obadiah wrote a short prophecy about the people of Edom.

READ: Obadiah 1:2-3

"See, I will make you small among the nations; you will be utterly despised. 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?'"

An Ancient Family Feud

Most scholars believe that Obadiah was written around 590 BC. Edom's story goes back way further than that, about 1300 years to be exact. Israel's and Edom's troubled history starts with a family feud between Jacob and Esau (Genesis 25:27-34).

Esau was Jacob's twin brother. Scripture paints a picture of Esau as the definition of masculinity. He hunted, fished, wrestled wild animals, had a quick temper, and lacked patience. His brother, Jacob, took advantage of Esau's lack of discipline by tricking him out of his inheritance. The twin brothers spent the rest of their lives trying to murder each other. As time passed on, they each took on new names. Jacob changed his name to Israel. Esau changed his name to Edom.

Do you see the importance of this context? Obadiah, over a thousand years after that famous fight among two brothers, wrote about the skirmish between the people of Edom and Israel. Yes, the family feud continued. For centuries, the Edomites hated the Israelites and lusted for revenge. Their hatred turned to horror when Edom went on a Jewish killing spree in Jerusalem (Psalm 137:7; Obadiah 1:11-14). God appointed Obadiah to deliver a harsh prophecy that reveals three errors that cause downfall.

Arrogance

Obadiah says that the people of Edom "live in the clefts of the rocks and make their home on the heights" (Obadiah 1:3). Edomites lived on a pedestal — both literally and figuratively. They carved their homes out of the mountains that surround the valley of Judah. Thus, they literally lived at a high elevation. That's not their issue, though.

Obadiah had no problem with their high altitudes; he had a problem with their arrogant attitudes. God despises arrogance. Thus, he promised to knock the Edomites off of their pedestal. It just happened to be a really high one. Downfall was inevitable. Edom thought they were big shots, but God vowed to "make them small."

The same is true for us. Fight off pride like the plague. When you experience success, it's easy to claim you did it all on your own. Fight that urge. In God's Kingdom, there is no such thing as a "self-made" person. Everything good comes from God. Pride distorts your perspective, but humility helps you see things more clearly. Pray for God to eradicate pride from your heart before it leads to downfall.

Prejudice

The people of Edom were taught anti-Hebrew prejudice from a very young age. We can infer that it was part of their schooling and upbringing. Their hatred was generational. How do we know that? Because none of them were alive when Jacob and Esau were on the earth. They had learned their racism, leading to their destruction a millennium later.

It grieves God when people judge someone by their appearance or by predisposed prejudice. We will keep this one simple. There is no room for racism, prejudice, or hatred in God's Kingdom. God made all of mankind in His image (1 Corinthians 11:7). He loves them all, cherishes them all, and expects us to carry the same respect.

Love your neighbor. Period. Do so regardless of what their ancestors did, regardless of what your family says, and regardless of any cultural standards suggesting otherwise.

Vengeance

Fueled by hatred and prejudice, the people of Edom took every opportunity for vengeance against the people of Judah. They partnered with other armies, sent out spies, and allowed vengeance to become a core value in their culture. A life obsessed with revenge is a life wasted.

While you probably don't have a thirteen-century family feud in your hometown, you have still desired revenge before. You've felt it. Someone hurt you, lied to you, spread a rumor about you, or caused you harm. It's hard and it hurts. Unfortunately, people are capable of terrible things. We see it in Israel's history and in our own experiences. It's heartbreaking to be on the receiving end of someone else's sin.

Your natural response is to seek revenge, right? Hurt them just like they hurt you. You have an innate desire to seek justice. However, you are not the initiator of justice. God is. Like Amos prophesied, God desires justice, but we are not called to be the judges. The Apostle Paul teaches, "Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, 'I will take revenge; I will pay them back,' says the LORD" (Romans 12:19). God will make things right in His time. If you set out to hurt others, you will hurt yourself. Weak people seek vengeance. Wise people seek forgiveness.

Let's strive to embody these valuable lessons within the shortest book of the Old Testament. Resist arrogance, prejudice, and vengeance. Embrace humility, acceptance, and forgiveness. The first leads to downfall; the second leads to success.

TALK IT OUT

Go through these questions with your circle. Be honest. Be open. Talk through the tough stuff.

Ice Breaker: Go around your circle and share this week's highs and lows. What was the best part of your week and what was the lowest part of your week?

Q1: What's one thing that stood out to you from today's message?

Q2: There's a famous saying that says "The bigger you are, the harder you fall." What does this mean? How could this apply to the people of Edom?

Q3: How can pride lead to downfall in our own lives?

Q4: What makes prejudices so hurtful to God?

Q5: How can we work to correct prejudices and end feuds in ways that glorify God?

Q6: What is revenge? Why does God steer us away from seeking revenge?

Application: What do you think God's calling you to overcome in your own life: pride, prejudice, or vengeance (seeking revenge)? What's one practical thing you can do every day this week to work on that.

READING PLAN

READ THESE PASSAGES IN ORDER EVERY DAY

Obadiah 1:1-7

Obadiah 1:8-14

Obadiah 1:15-21

1 Corinthians 12:26

Colossians 3:1-11

Matthew 22:26-40

Philippians 2:1-11

Do the following with each passage:

ASK– God to connect with you here. In prayer, start by slowing down and inviting God to be present. Begin with focus and openness to see what God has for you today.

READ– the selected section of Scripture slowly. Take note of the words and phrases that intrigue you, reading them a second time if necessary.

REFLECT– on what grabs you. How does this passage personally relate to your own life and experiences?

RESPOND– to the Scripture. Speak directly to God about what's on your mind and heart. Look for ways to live out what you've uncovered.