



Sibling rivalry is a reality of life. For those who have a sibling or two, it starts young. Like the first-grader who came home and proudly reported to her dad she was now officially a “Brownie.” Not to be outdone, her three-year-old brother rushed up and proudly announced he was a cupcake!

I can relate. I was “blessed” with just one brother. We competed at everything, and being the younger, I usually lost. Now we argue over which one of us looks older. He chides me for my gray hair and I chide him for his lack of hair! But it never ends.

Sibling rivalry can get serious, too. It can cut deep and last a lifetime. The Bible is full of these stories. Cain and Abel. Joseph and his brothers. The story of the Prodigal Son is about two brothers, torn apart by rebellion, jealousy and pride.

Nowhere is this more true than in the relationship of twin brothers Jacob and Esau. Even as they came out of the womb, the younger, Jacob, was grabbing at the heels of his older brother. Their parents didn't help. Dad favored Esau, a “man's man.” Mom doted on the younger, Jacob, who liked to stay at home and cook. After Jacob manipulated his brother to give up his family birthright, and tricked his dad into passing the family blessing onto him rather than his older brother, Jacob fled for his life to Haran.

Twenty years later, with his wives and children in tow, he returned, and Esau was waiting with an army of 400 men. But as they met on the road, rather than blood flowing it was tears. It was a touching reunion, but these two families grew into separate nations. The descendants of Esau became known as the Edomites, and Jacob's, of course, the Israelites. The land of Canaan couldn't sustain them both so Esau moved to what was called the hill country of Seir, and later Edom.

The animosity flared up generations later after Israel was freed from slavery in Egypt. Moses asked permission to pass through Edom on their way to the promised land, but the king of Edom said no and put up a military barricade (Numbers 20:14-21). Years later King David conquered the Edomites and from that time through the reign of Solomon the Edomites were subject to Israel. But a grudge that started with the bickering of two twin boys mushroomed into two proud nations at war.

Background to Obadiah

Why do I bring this up? This morning we're looking at the Old Testament book of Obadiah. We'll see Obadiah is another

chapter in this ancient sibling rivalry between Jacob and Esau. You may have never heard of Obadiah. I must confess I've never heard a sermon from this book, much less preached one! It's no wonder—he's hard to find! This is the most “minor” of the Minor Prophets. It's only 21 verses and the shortest book in the Old Testament.

We don't know much about Obadiah. His name means “servant of Yahweh.” Everyone wanted their son to be a servant of God so there are lots of guys in the Old Testament with that name, but the prophet Obadiah can't for certain be identified as any one of them. We don't even know exactly when he lived and wrote the book, although the book itself gives some clues. It clearly refers to a time when Judah and Jerusalem were invaded and plundered. Most scholars believe this is speaking about what happened in 586 BC when Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian army ransacked Jerusalem and deported most of her inhabitants into exile.

But here's the deal: The Edomites, descendants of Jacob, participated in this. At the very least the Edomites delighted in and benefited from Judah's downfall. Like a bitter older brother, they looked down on their wounded sibling and said, “Na, Na, Na-na Na.” You can imagine how God's people felt. They're wondering, “God, where are you in all of this? Where's your justice? How can you stand by and allow our enemies to do this, especially **these** enemies, our own brothers? Don't you care?”

Have you ever felt like that? We all do from time to time. Life doesn't always go the way we want. It's not always fair. The good guys don't always win. It was the prophet Obadiah's job to speak into this. As he does, he gets to the real root of all sibling rivalry. His words diagnose the real problem.

Overview of Obadiah

The judgment of Edom

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, let us go against her for battle—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?’ Though you soar like the eagle and make your nest among the stars, from there I will bring

you down,” declares the LORD. “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? But how Esau will be ransacked, his hidden treasures pillaged! 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. “In that day,” declares the LORD, “will I not destroy the wise men of Edom, those of understanding in the mountains of Esau? Your warriors, Teman, will be terrified, and everyone in Esau’s mountains will be cut down in the slaughter” (verses 1–9).

The book begins as God announces His plans to judge Edom. God reveals to Obadiah He’s declaring war on Edom. He invites surrounding nations to join in the battle. Though Edom was great in her own eyes, God will make her small. You don’t have to read far before you get the impression Edom was enormously proud. God speaks of *“the pride of your heart.”* If you look carefully you can see Edom had many reasons to be proud. She had a lot going for her.

First, there were her natural defenses. He notes *“you live in the clefts of the rocks and make your home on the heights.”* The central area of Edom has red sandstone cliffs that rise to the height of over 5,000 feet. These cliffs are easily fortified. Perhaps you’ve heard of Petra. It was an almost impenetrable fortress in Edom. Experts say because of its position in the mountains a dozen men could hold it against an army. No wonder the Edomites said to themselves, “Who can bring me down to the ground?” God says, I can: *“Though you soar like an eagle and make your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down.”*

That’s not all. Edom was also proud because her of wealth. She was situated along the great trade routes between Syria and Egypt. Trade brought business and the people grew rich from the tolls exacted from the many caravans. But God says when I’m done with you nothing will be left! Even thieves leave something behind when they steal. Not even grape harvesters can pick every grape. *“But how Esau will be ransacked, his hidden treasures pillaged!”*

If that weren’t enough she also had powerful allies. If somehow they needed help, they could call on their powerful friends. But God says, *“All your allies will force you to the border; your friends will deceive and overpower you.”*

One more thing: Verse 8 mentions *“the wise men from Edom.”* The Edomites were known for their wisdom. It wasn’t God’s wisdom; it was worldly wisdom. In fact, scholars point out the Edomites left no record of allegiance or dependence on any god. They’re unique in this regard. It’s like they were the first secular society. They thought so much of themselves they didn’t need

any higher power in their lives. They had it all figured out. But God says *“I will destroy the wise men of Edom.”*

Natural defenses. Powerful allies. A booming economy. Intellectual prowess. No wonder they were so proud! But one of the things we know about God is He hates pride. The first sin was the sin of a proud angel who wanted to be equal with God. Later, he tempted the first woman by saying, “Eat this fruit and you’ll be like God.” To this day, the evil one loves to cultivate within individuals or nations an attitude that says, “I can do it myself. I don’t need God. I don’t want anyone running my life except me. I have what it takes.”

The Edomites trusted in all these things. People today trust in all these things. What do you trust in? You see, God wants you secure not in your accomplishments, your bank account, your brains, your experience, but rather in Him. He wants to be your fortress, your rock, your shield and your strong tower. Obadiah says to the proud, trust not in yourself, or else He’ll bring you down. Like He said to the Edomites, “The pride of your heart has deceived you.” Usually the way that happens is the very thing you trust in fails you. Though you soar like an eagle, He brings you down.

The charges against Edom

The reason for that is what pride causes us to do. Pride is something in our heart and we can’t really see into a person’s heart. So in verses 10–14 God reveals how this Edomite pride manifested itself.

“Because of the violence against your brother Jacob, you will be covered with shame; you will be destroyed forever. 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. You should not gloat over 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. You should not march through the gates of my people in the day of their disaster, nor gloat over them in their calamity in the day of their disaster, nor seize their wealth in the day of their disaster. You should not wait at the crossroads to cut down their fugitives, nor hand over their survivors in the day of their trouble.”

These are the charges God brings against Edom. Before we look at the specific actions notice what made all of these things especially deplorable is they were directed towards “your brother Jacob.” God goes all the way back to the story of those two brothers, Jacob and Esau. He reminds them they were brothers and brothers aren’t supposed to treat each other that way. They should rush to one another’s defense. God Himself had said to Israel, *“You shall not detest an Edomite, for he is your brother”*

(Deut 23:7a). It goes both ways, but the Edomites had trampled on this sacred relationship.

He mentions several things. First, *“the violence done to your brother Jacob.”* How much of the violence in our society is the result of pride? I’d guess a lot. From the man who strikes his wife to the nation that deploys an army, pride is the root. Pride is centered only on self and it strikes out against anything that dares to challenge its supreme reign in life.

But it also can be seen in indifference. Verse 11 says they *“stood aloof”* when strangers carried off their wealth and foreigners entered their gates. Sometimes just standing there and doing nothing reveals our pride. I see this in marriages. How is it a couple can get to the place where they’re indifferent to one another’s problems and needs? I hear it all the time: “My husband is indifferent to me. He doesn’t care about me. He ignores me.” Or, “She pays no attention to me. She isn’t interested in the things I’m interested in.” But if you dig around that a little bit, you see selfishness and pride and wounded egos are the reason.

He mentions something else. Not only did they stand aloof but they also gloated, rejoiced and even boasted over their brothers’ calamity. What is it within us that secretly enjoys seeing someone else go down, even a brother? James Boice makes a very astute observation: this word “gloat” means to “look down on.” He defines this as “an improper curiosity about their brother’s tragedy.” They stood aloof but they sure wanted to know every gory detail of their downfall. He says, “I know Christians who act like that. They never help anyone, but they’re not adverse to finding out the wicked details of some other Christians failings.”

But Obadiah takes it one step further. He says they actually kicked them when they were down. They marched through their gates and seized their wealth in the day of their disaster. They waited at the crossroads and cut down the survivors. The proud, self-driven heart will be more than willing to personally benefit from another’s misfortune. The Lord says three times “You should not” have done this.

Those are the charges. God says this is how your pride manifested itself. The worst thing is you did this to your brother. Maybe you wonder, how do I know if I have Edomite pride running through my veins? Well, you look for the signs. Pride that resides and hides deep in our heart eventually shows up; it leaks out. Obadiah would simply ask us, how do you treat your brother? When your brother is down, when he’s hurting, when you might be tempted to give him another kick, or just be a little too curious over the details, what do you do?

You ask, well, who is my brother? We can answer that on three levels. First, your brother is anyone in your biological family. There is a responsibility we all have to our moms and dads, brothers and sisters, grandparents. But it’s more than that. Your brother is also your neighbor. Jesus said, “Love your neighbor as

yourself.” When someone asked, “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus told a story about a Samaritan who saw someone he didn’t even know who was in need and whose need he could meet. That’s your neighbor; that’s your brother. But I think most importantly, your brother is anyone you’re related to in Christ Jesus. Read your Bible and you’ll see the relationship between members of the Body of Christ are sacred and to be protected at all costs. In the book of Acts alone, there are 51 references to the fact that we’re brothers and sisters in Christ. How you think about your brothers and sisters in Christ, how you talk about your brothers and sisters in Christ, how you treat them, is very important to your Father.

I received an e-mail awhile back from a pastor friend. He’d been working hard to plant a church here on the Peninsula and his e-mail explained he was tired and throwing in the towel. How do I respond to that? My pride responds with an unspoken delight. Their loss could be our gain, right? Their doors are closing but our doors are still wide open. Come on over here! And then the Holy Spirit who roams the empty halls of my heart whispers in my ear: “You proud Edomite! That’s your brother. You find a way to go pick him up.” Why is it so hard to truly in our heart of hearts weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice? Why do we tend to rejoice when our brothers are weeping and weep when they’re rejoicing? It’s almost like we think our Father in heaven only has so many blessings to go around, and if someone else lacks something that’s our gain, but if they gain something it’s our loss.

The outlook for Edom

How does God deal with the proud? God says in verses 15–16 the day is coming when Edom and all the proud who defy Him destroy their brother will be brought down.

“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. 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.”

What’s interesting about this is Edom did fall. Edom lost its independence about 100 years later. From 312 BC her land was controlled by the Nabateans. Eventually, the Edomites were literally thrown out of their own land and forced to live in the southern part of Judah. God says what will happen to Edom typifies what will happen to all nations who proudly oppose God and oppress His people.

This is true of the U.S.A. We love our country. We pray for our country. But where are the great kingdoms and empires today who in the past have proudly vaunted themselves? Has God not made them small? Some years ago Ruth Bell Graham was reading about the moral condition in our country and she turned to her friend and said, “I think that if God does not bring judgment on

the United States one day he will have to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah." A catastrophe awaits every nation that vaunts itself against the Lord.

But what about God's people? What about those who cry out to God, "Where's your justice? How can you stand by and allow our brothers to do this? Don't you care? Won't you do something?" Look at verses 17–21.

"But on Mount Zion will be deliverance; it will be holy, and Jacob will possess his inheritance. Jacob will be a fire and Joseph a flame; Esau will be stubble, and they will set him on fire and destroy him. There will be no survivors from Esau." The LORD has spoken. 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. 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. Deliverers will go up on Mount Zion to govern the mountains of Esau. And the kingdom will be the LORD's.

God says to His people, "I'll bring you back. You'll possess the land. You'll inhabit the very places your enemies lived. You'll worship in your temple. You'll find deliverance on Mt Zion." And they did. After 70 years in exile they came back and rebuilt their temple. But this isn't just about Israel. What God did with Israel is an example of what He'll do in that final, climactic Day of the Lord at the end of history. In that day, **"the Kingdom will be the Lord's."** Jesus taught us to pray **"Your Kingdom come...on earth as it is in heaven."** Here that prayer is answered; the Kingdom has come and the King of Kings rules over all.

Now all of this was meant to be a message of encouragement to God's people. He wants us to know that though the proud often prosper while you suffer, He's still in charge. He's in charge of the affairs of both nations and individuals. That includes all the details of life. It's hard to believe that when things aren't going your way. It makes it even harder when someone far worse than you is getting all the breaks. But God is still in charge. Israel needed to believe that as they were being hauled off into exile while their Edomite brothers stood there and laughed. We need to believe that as our economy spirals downward, or a child grows distant from the Lord, or a job search goes on and on. Obadiah reminds

us God is still in charge. He rules over the affairs of our lives. And He promises the day will come when the tables will be turned and the kingdom will be the Lord's.

The king is coming. His name is Jesus. Remember what He said? **"He who exalts himself will be humbled; but he who humbles himself, will be exalted."** If you're the one who is down; if you're the one being kicked and laughed at as the Israelites were in this story, and if you **know** this King, then that will be a great comfort to you. But if you're among the proud, if you're one of those who says, "I trust in no one but myself," you're in danger. Deliverance is found in Him, the one who died on Mt. Zion. Put your trust in Him; make Him your fortress and you will be safe forever.

It makes me think of two kings who confronted each other. One was an earthly king. His name was Herod Antipas. He was the son of Herod the Great, the one who slaughtered the babes of Bethlehem to get rid of the Christ child. His son, Antipas, was no better. He'd beheaded John the Baptist. He'd divorced his wife to marry the wife of his half-brother. What you probably didn't know is these Herods were Edomites and once again their outstanding characteristic was pride. Antipas was wealthy, powerful. If anyone stood in his way, the life of that person meant as little to him as the lives those innocent children did to his father. His philosophy of life was, "It's all about me." He was the epitome of human pride. He exalted himself.

The other king, of course, was Jesus. He was the true King of Israel, the natural heir to David's throne. But He didn't look like a king. He stood before Antipas like a sheep ready for slaughter. Antipas wanted Him to do a miracle like it was some kind of trick. He plied Him with many questions but Jesus didn't say a word. He mocked Him by dressing Him in an elegant robe, but then he sent Him back to Pilate. Jesus could have called forth legions of angels to sweep Herod from his throne, but instead within just a few hours He would die a felon's death. He humbled Himself.

Herod exalted himself and said "What's in it for me?" But Jesus humbled Himself and said, "I'm here to do my Father's will. He has sent me to give my life for my brothers, so they can find life." In the end, Jesus was raised up in glory; Herod died at an unknown date while in exile in Gaul.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

© 2011 Central Peninsula Church, Foster City, CA
Catalog No. 1362-4