

Lesson #33 – Obadiah 2019

Before starting this lesson, read the book of **Obadiah**. You may find it helpful to read the book, go thru the lesson and then read the book once again. Since it is a short book, it will not be difficult to do.

Obadiah is the shortest book in the Old Testament, so it is hard to find any background material. Did you notice there is absolutely no information about the prophet himself? There is nothing about his family, age, where he lives or where he is speaking from. The name Obadiah was very common. So no matter how much detective work we do, there is nothing we can learn about the author.

However, there are two **historical** clues that tell us **when he wrote the book**.

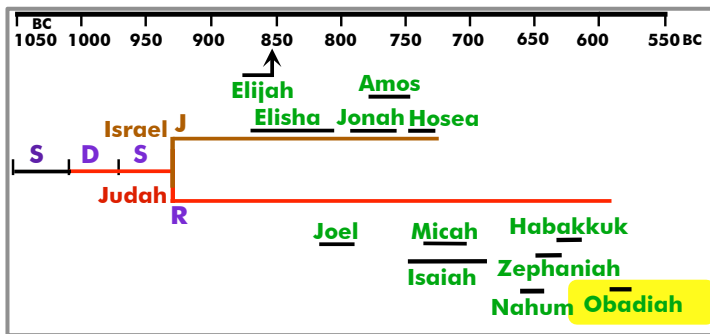
According to verse 1, this book is about the nation of **Edom**.

In verse 11, we are told that Jerusalem was invaded and Edom was involved.

The books of Jeremiah, Ezekiel and one of the Psalms, tells us **this** happened during Babylon's attack, in 586 BC.

In verse 19, Obadiah says the Jews, who are now scattered, will **once again** live in the land. This means, as he is writing, they are not in the land - exactly the situation in the 500's after Judah was exiled to Babylon.

These clues tell us that Obadiah is writing, **after** Judah has gone into exile, but when everyone still remembers the details. This



would be somewhere between **585 and 580 BC**. Altho nothing is said about his location, we can assume because Obadiah is a Jew, he is living in exile with the others.

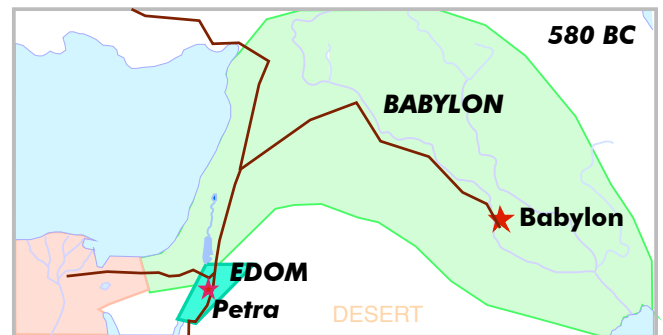
As you look at the chart, you can see where he fits in relation to the other prophets. He begins some 20 years after Habakkuk ends his ministry.

On the world scene, the Babylonian empire is in control. The nation of Judah no longer exists.

However, a nation just to the south, **is** flourishing. Her name is **Edom**. Her boundaries run from the south end of the Dead Sea to the eastern arm of the Red Sea. Because of her location, she controls the southeastern crossroads of commerce. The King's Highway - a road that all eastern caravans used in order to travel north and south, goes right thru her country. Another road in her country runs east and west, providing a route between Egypt, Arabia and Babylon.

These roads give Edom a tremendous advantage. She collects tolls from every caravan and trader who uses them. She also has first choice in selling or trading with the caravans. Or she can ambush and rob the caravans. She was known for her highway robbery. All of this has brought great prosperity to the nation of Edom.

Her capital is just west of the King's Highway. In Hebrew, it was called **Sela**; in Greek it was called **Petra**. Both words mean **rock or cliff**. The Bible usually calls it **Mt. Seir**. This is the Hebrew word for **rough or shaggy**. This tells us her capital was on a rough or shaggy cliff.



From this background we now have the **DATE** of the book, 585-580 BC, and the **LOCATION** of Edom.

But to understand the book, we also need the **HISTORY** of Edom. Where did it come from and how did it start?

This takes us all the way back to the book of Genesis to some very well known stories.

In Genesis 25, we are told about a couple named Isaac and Rebecca. They had twin boys - Jacob and Esau. Because Esau was born first, he had special rights and privileges known as the **birthright**. He would receive a double portion of the inheritance. This means the inheritance would be divided into 3 parts. He would get two parts and his brother, one part. The birthright also gave Esau leadership and responsibility over his brother and their families.

But the most important part of Esau's birthright was the spiritual privilege. As an adult, he would be the spiritual leader, for not only his own family, but also for the entire family clan.

And because he was from the line of Abraham and Sarah, the birthright gave Esau's descendants the right to the Promised Land and to become the family line of Jesus. These were the special rights and promises that came down thru Abraham, thru Isaac and now to be passed on to the first-born – to Esau.

When the boys grow up, this birthright creates a problem. Because it involves the Promised Land and the line of Jesus, it **has** to go to the person and family whose faith is in Yahweh God and who will continue this knowledge of Him. Esau has decided he is not interested in the God of his parents and grandparents. He has chosen to worship the pagan gods of the Canaanites – the gods Baal, Ashteroth and Molech. Jacob is following Yahweh God. So the birthright needs to go to him. But how? Esau was born first. He already has the birthright.

In the culture of that day, thruout the Middle East, it was common to buy and sell one's birthright. Archeology has found records of a birthright sold for 3 sheep. The price of the birthright was determined by how much you thought it was worth - how much value you placed on it. According to Genesis 25, Esau felt his birthright was practically worthless. So he sold it and Jacob bought it for a bowl of stew – a bowl of lentils. This was perfectly legitimate and part of their culture.

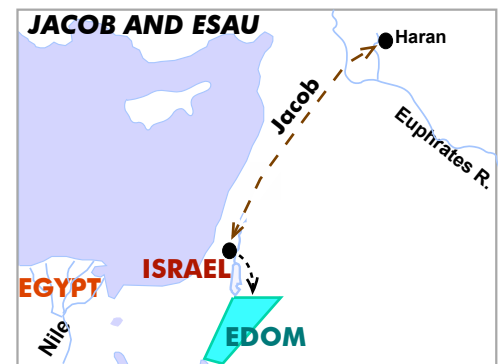
However, another step was needed to activate the birthright or make it valid. Jacob had to receive a special blessing directly from his father, near the time of his father's death. Instead of letting God arrange that part of it, Jacob got the blessing thru deception and trickery. In this he was totally wrong and it was costly. It started a chain of events that would last for almost 2000 years.

When Esau finds out that Jacob got the blessing instead of him, he becomes bitter and vengeful. He is so angry, he threatens to kill his brother. The parents immediately send Jacob 500 miles to the north to live with his uncle Laban. Over the next 20 years he gets married and has a large family.

He then returns home. He gets together with Esau. They give each other expensive gifts, say nice things to each other and appear to reconcile.

Each settle down in their own territory. Jacob lives in the land God promised to Abraham, Isaac and now to him, because he has the birthright.

Esau and his family move to the south and east of there. As time passes, he and the family clan take over the people and their land.



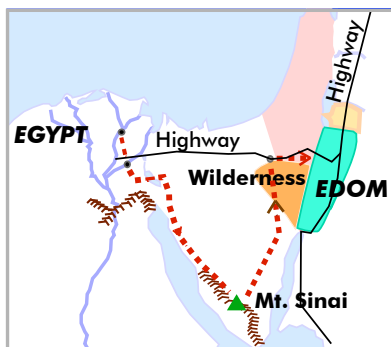
According to Genesis 25:30, Esau had a nickname. Translated into English, it would be **Red**. The Hebrew word is **Edom**.

Esau then names his new area after himself, calling it **Edom**. His descendants become known as the **Edomites**.

Genesis 32:28 tells us Jacob also has another name. God gave him the name **Israel**; so his land will later be called **Israel** and his descendants become known as the **Israelites**.

Even tho it looked like the brothers reconciled, Esau never forgave his brother Jacob. He kept all that bitterness and resentment inside of him and then, passed it on to his family. The conflict started between Esau and Jacob - or to use their other names - between **Edom** and **Israel**.

After many years, Jacob and his family clan move to Egypt. During the next 400 years, they end up in slavery. God then uses Moses to get them out. By this time the family clan has become a nation.

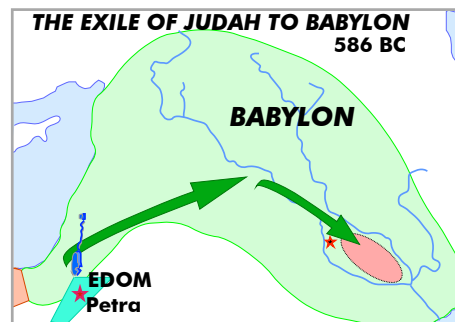


After 40 years, Moses is ready to lead the Jews into the Promised Land. They are in the Sinai Peninsula, just west of Edom on the east-west road. Moses sends a message to the king of Edom, asking permission to go thru Edom, so the Jews can get on the north-south King's Highway. This would save them weeks of travel and take them directly north to the east bank of the Jordan River. When the king sends back a message of **no**, Moses asks a second time, explaining they will pay for all the water they use. He promises not to touch their crops or food. However the king of Edom still refuses. We have this story in Numbers chapter 20.

The resentment and bitterness from their ancestor Esau is still there. The *family* feud is now a *national* feud between the Edomites and the Israelites.

Another 800 years go by. Once again there is a crucial encounter between these 2 nations. In fact, it is so traumatic that a prayer is written about it. This is a song written by a Jewish exile living in Babylon.

*By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion (Jerusalem). There on the poplars we hung our harps, for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion". How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill. May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you and if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy. Remember O Lord, what the **Edomites** did on the day Jerusalem fell. Tear it down, they cried, tear it down to its foundations. Psalm 137:1-7.*



In 586 BC, when Babylon came and destroyed Jerusalem, the Edomites were watching.

They said to each other, *Oh good, let's hope Jerusalem and the nation of Judah is totally wiped out.* A Jewish man is in the area. He hears and sees how Edom is involved. After being exiled to Babylon, he writes a Psalm. He prays for God's justice – that God will remember and punish Edom for what she did.

Some 5 years go by and God responds to this man's prayer. He uses Obadiah to say,
I do remember what Edom did and I will bring justice.

The book of Obadiah is God's plans for Edom. It explains what He is going to do.

OUTLINE	Edom will be destroyed	1:1-16
	Judah will be restored	1:17-21

To put it another way, God, thru the prophet Obadiah, says,

He is going to take Edom **off** the map

He will put the Jews back **on** the map.

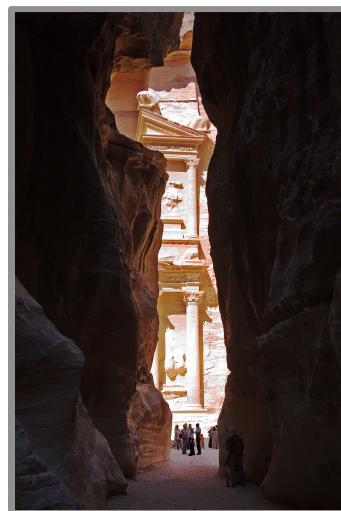
To appreciate what God says, we need to know about Edom's capital, the city of **PETRA**.



The only approach to Edom's capital is thru a deep winding gorge.

Tall, huge cliffs going up 300 feet are on either side.

After winding for over a mile, the gorge narrows to just 6 feet.



On the other side, is the valley floor, 1 mile by 3/4 of a mile.

When Edom was a nation, Petra, their capital was not built on the valley floor. It was on the north side of the valley, 1000 feet up, on top of a large shaggy cliff.

Thinking of this geography, let's read verses 3-4 in the book of Obadiah.

*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? Tho you soar like the eagle and make your nest among the stars, from there **I** will bring you down, declares the Lord.*



What an exact description! Petra the capital, on top of the rock cliff 1000 feet high, is like an eagle's nest - close to the stars. She is secure, knowing that just a handful of men can defend the 6 foot entrance into the valley floor. Even if the enemy does get thru, the only way to the capital, at the top of the rock cliff, is thru a secret passageway in the side of the cliff.

From a human standpoint, Petra is totally secure. No one can bring her down. But God says in verse 4, **I** will bring you down .

Since God is fair, He explains **why** He will do this to Edom.

According to verse 3, He will do it because of her **pride**.

For more than 1000 years, with nations and empires all around her, Petra has survived. With this kind of history, she believes she can always take care of herself. She certainly would never need Yahweh, the God of the Jews. God is going to destroy her because of her pride.

According to verse 10, another reason is *because of the **violence** against your brother Jacob*. Verses 11-14 describe the violence and how it progressed when Babylon had attacked the Jews.

Verse **11** - *On the day you stood aloof – on the day you stood by.*

At first, Edom showed **indifference**.

According to international law of that day, **people** with blood ties were obligated to help each other.

International law also said if there were blood ties between **nations**, they were obligated to be allies. There certainly were blood ties between Edom and Israel since they had descended from twin brothers. Edom broke international law. As Judah was being conquered, she stood by indifferently.

That was bad enough, but then...

Verse **12**,

You should not look down on your brother in the day of his misfortune, nor rejoice over the people of Judah.

Not only had the Edomites been indifferent, but then they were **gleeful** spectators.

Verse **13** *You should not have seized their wealth in the day of their disaster.* They had shared in the **plunder**.

Verse **14** *You should not have waited at the crossroads to cut down their fugitives, nor have handed over their survivors in the day of trouble*

During the two years that Babylon had surrounded Jerusalem, many Jews had found ways to escape during the night. They immediately headed for the King's highway, so they could get as far away as possible from the Babylonian empire. The most logical direction was to head south. But Edom's soldiers were along the highway and used the opportunity to kill them. Other Jews they captured. No doubt they received a bounty price for each person they turned over to the Babylonians. So Edom not only watched; she actually **participated** in Judah's destruction. This is **why** God is going to punish her.

But **how** is He going to do it?

Verse 2. *See I will make you small among the nations; you will be utterly despised.*

Edom rejoiced when the nation of Judah was taken off the map and no longer existed. Now Edom will be made small and eventually be taken off the map.

Looking at a map today, there is no nation of Edom in the Middle East. There are no Edomites. God took **her** off the map.

But later, God put the **Jews** back on the map. First, in **536 BC**.

Six hundred years later, she was taken off the map again and remained off for almost 2000 years.

Then faithful to His promise, in **1948 AD**, God put her back on the map.

Edom was totally destroyed; Israel has been restored.

Verse 6, *how **Esau**, another name for Edom – how Edom will be ransacked, his hidden treasures pillaged.*

When the capital of Petra was conquered, all the valuables were taken. Archeologists who excavated the top of that rock cliff, have never found anything of value. Down on the valley floor where other civilizations later developed their capital, hundreds of valuable artifacts have been discovered. But nothing was left of Edom's treasures, just as God said.

Verse 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.*

In spite of having blood ties to the Jews, Edom had been indifferent when Judah needed help. Edom's punishment is that when she needs help, her allies and friends will betray her and drive her from the land.

Verses 8-9 *In that day, declares the Lord, will I not destroy the wise men of Edom? Men of understanding in the mountains of Esau? Your warriors, O Teman will be terrified.*

The nation of Edom always survived thru human wisdom and strength. God will bring judgment by taking that wisdom from her.

Verse 10, God says, *You will be destroyed forever.*

Verse 15, *As you have done, it will be done to you; your deeds will return upon your own head.*

God is going to judge Edom in proportion to her sin. She will get exactly what she deserves.

Verses 1-16 are about the **destruction of Edom**.

Verses 17-21 describe the **restoration of the Jews**.

Verse 18 *There will be no survivors from the house of Esau. The Lord has spoken.*

Verses 19-20 are a contrast – They are a list of the areas Jewish people will eventually have.

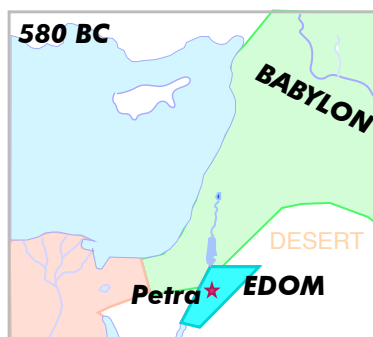
As Obadiah is writing, there is no nation of Judah. No Jews are living in the land.

But God gives the promise, Judah **will** return and repossess it.

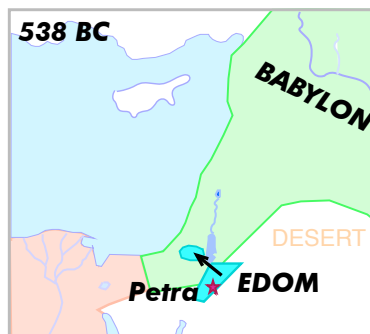
In addition, when Jesus is King in His kingdom,

Jews from all twelve tribes will be reunited and live thruout the entire region.

God has said that He will destroy Edom – both the nation and people. Our culture always likes to know the details. *What specific things did He do? When did He do them? How did it happen?* Obadiah and even the rest of Scripture does not tell us. It is secular history that gives us the details.

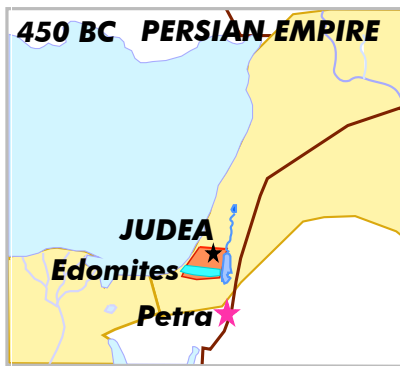


Edom had absolute security when Obadiah wrote in the **580's**.



But just 40 years later, in **538 BC**, Nabatean Arabs who had been Edom's ally, betrayed and attacked her.

Half the people fled to where southern Judah had been, leaving the nation of Edom **one half the size** she had been. God was making her smaller.



By **450 BC**, the Nabateans had taken over the Edomite area and were in control of the King's Highway. The rest of the Edomite people now moved to southern Judah. With this, Edom, as a **nation, was gone**.

All that was left was the **capital** of Petra, on top of the cliff.

Because of its security, the Edomite leaders and elite people were able to hold on for another 100 years. I am sure one of the reasons was that the Nabatean Arabs did not think it was urgent to do anything about them. From Edom's point of view however, she became even more sure that no one could capture it. But then it happened.

By **312 BC**, the Nabateans took Petra and now, even

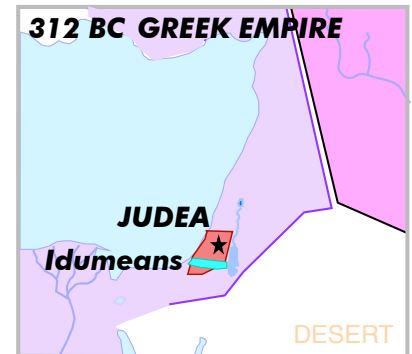
Edom's capital was gone.

So many times in history, God works in the simplest of ways.



This certainly was true of Petra.

Remember, the only way to the top of the cliff was thru a secret passageway. When the Arabs decided to take Petra, they hid a few soldiers on the valley floor, just to watch. After weeks, perhaps even months, one day an Edomite soldier on top of the cliff, dropped his helmet and it went bouncing down the side of the cliff, 1000 feet to the valley floor. Convinced that no one was anywhere in the area, the soldier came down thru the secret passage, got his helmet and went back thru the entrance of the passageway. Later the Arab soldiers confirmed the location. They organized their troops and one night went up the passage, taking the capital Petra with little effort.



With all its security, we would expect the Nabateans to now make it **their** stronghold. But for whatever reason, they ignored it and let it disintegrate. They, and the Romans after them, developed their capital of Petra on the valley floor. It was the Nabateans who carved the buildings in the rock all around the sides. Neither the Nabateans nor anyone else after them has ever rebuilt a capital on top of the rock cliff. Thruout the centuries, it has remained desolate just as God said it would.

The land and capital of the nation of Edom was now gone. But the Edomite people still had a national identity. From the 500's to the 130's BC, they lived in southern Judah. Because they lived as a separate people with their own laws, the area became known as **Idumea**. This was the Greek way of saying Edom.

But then in **125 BC**, Jews, under the leadership of the Maccabees, took control of the land that had belonged to them in the past. They told the Edomites if they wanted to stay and live in Jewish land, they would have to live under Jewish laws.

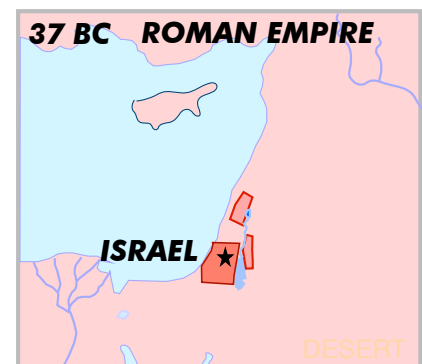
Verse 18 of Obadiah said *the house of Jacob will be a fire ... the house of Esau will be stubble and the people of Judah will set the stubble on fire and consume it.*

The Jewish people consumed Edom so they were no longer a separate people with their own laws.

Their national identity was lost.

In **37 BC**, the Roman empire expanded and chose puppet kings to rule for them in those areas that were far away. The first king they chose to put over the Jews was a man descended from the Edomites, who was living in the area. His name was **Herod** the Great. Greek and Jewish historians say he was from Idumea. While he is king, Jesus is born.

Herod the Edomite tries to kill Jesus, the Israelite. The **conflict** that started between Esau and Jacob - between the Edomites and the Israelites, is now in the New Testament.



Herod the Great dies and one of his sons, **Herod Antipas**, is put in charge. He continues the conflict by killing John the Baptizer. He makes fun of Jesus at his trial, just before the crucifixion.

CONFLICT BETWEEN "EDOM AND ISRAEL"		
6 BC TO 70 AD		
Herod the Great	Jesus	tried to kill him
Herod Antipas	John the Baptist	killed him
Herod Agrippa	James; Peter	kills James arrests Peter
Agrippa II	Paul, a prisoner	refused to free him

When he dies, his son **Herod Agrippa** takes over. He kills James the apostle and tries to kill Peter.

He dies and his son, **Agrippa II** comes to power. He listens to Paul's defense as a prisoner and says, *I know he is innocent, but I refuse to give him his freedom.* The conflict continues between those of Edom and those of Israel.

In **70 AD**, when the Romans destroyed the Jewish nation and killed over one million Jews, they also killed most of the Edomites, because they were living in the same area. Some however managed to escape to live in the surrounding areas.

They and their descendants continued until **663 AD**, when they were destroyed by the followers of Mohammed.

With this, the Edomites became extinct and totally forgotten until **1812** when Petra was re-discovered by a Swiss archaeologist. In all that time and even today, the area on top of the rock cliff has always remained desolate.

God did not destroy Edom suddenly like He did to Nineveh. He took His time - little by little over a period of 1000 years; but He kept His word. Everything He said He would do to Edom was accomplished. So today, there are no people and no nation of Edom and there never will be.

However the valley floor that was developed by the Nabatean Arabs and Romans has been restored. Today it is part of Jordan. Roads have been built, leading to the entrance of the winding gorge. It has become a tourist attraction with four thousand people a day, visiting the area. What is amazing is that the Edomites are never mentioned. Even the guides and people from that area are unaware that it was Edom's land for 1000 years.

Many Bible scholars, including myself, believe that sometime in the future, a world leader will try to kill all the Jews in Israel. The books of Zephaniah and Revelation say that during this time of God's judgment, Jews who believe in and follow the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, will be hidden by God. They will be in Petra for three and one half years. The word **hidden** cannot mean in an **unknown** place since hundreds of books and teachers mention the location. It means they will be **protected** by God.

With modern warfare, we might question how even a place like Petra could protect them. However, it is not the place, but the person – God – who will protect them. Since what He said about Edom has come true, we can believe that what He says about protecting His people in that place will also come true.

Historically, Obadiah is a fascinating book involving a lot of history.

But the **spiritual lesson about bitterness** is the most important.

The bitterness of Esau against his brother affected his life and the lives of others for almost 2000 years. The author of Hebrews uses this story to warn **us**. I am reading from the Living Bible, because of its clarity.

Watch out that no bitterness takes root among you, for as it springs up, it causes deep trouble, hurting many in their spiritual lives. 12:15

We all know the **feelings** of bitterness. But in order to deal with bitterness, we have to **understand** it.

Bitterness is unresolved anger.

Anger, in and of itself, is not wrong. **Anger** is a God-given emotion so we can respond to things that are wrong and take appropriate action. When we see evil or experience others wanting to intentionally hurt us, it will make us **angry**. That is a healthy emotion. It is good. But how we use our emotion to deal with the injustice is not always good.

We can choose to lose control and become violent in words or actions, always thinking how we can get even.

Or we may want to avoid confrontation, so we ignore, deny, excuse or "stuff" our feelings of anger. But the feelings are still there, just buried further down. Over time, they will show up, either in our physical health or our mental health. When it affects our minds, this unresolved anger grows into a root of bitterness which will damage our spiritual life.

God has given us the emotion of anger. To avoid **bitterness**, He has given us constructive ways to use our anger.

Anger produces energy so we can **take appropriate action** against evil and protect ourselves and others.

Anger also requires learning the right kind of **forgiveness**.

Forgiveness

What it is not

Forgiveness does **not** mean to overlook injustice; to minimize wrong; to forget or pretend injustice never happened.

Forgiveness does **not** mean we accept deliberate evil or smile and say *that's OK. It was nothing.*

Forgiveness does **not** mean we become a doormat.

Forgiveness does **not** mean we have to continue a relationship or interaction with a person.

What it is

The **two-sided forgiveness** - to forgive as Christ forgave us.

The guilty person has to take the initiative, admit the wrong they did to us and ask our forgiveness.

That is their part.

Our part is that we choose to no longer hold the injustice against them. If the person is controlling or dangerous, we do not have to be their friend or have a close relationship with them. But if their apology is genuine, we have let go of the anger by not holding the injustice against them.

This comes with 2 warnings because not everyone is genuine.

People with addictions of alcohol, drugs and pornography, use apologies for manipulation. They are not genuine. So after 2 or 3 apologies and they continue to fail, we have to refuse any more words until they change their behavior for a minimum of one year.

Here's the second warning. After we have forgiven a person, we should still use the legal system to hold people accountable for any illegal actions such as theft, abuse, assault or other crimes. There have to be consequences for serious offenses.

This 2-sided forgiveness is all about deliberate, intentional wrong against us. Many times, people do things against us that are unintentional. There are misunderstandings. In those cases, **we** are to take the initiative and go to the other person. That is what Matthew 18 is all about.

But when the injustice or wrong has been intentional and both sides want to reconcile, God has two-sided forgiveness. We are **never** to take the initiative. The one who is guilty must come to us and apologize.

The problem is, the majority of people who are most guilty will never apologize.

So God has given another kind of forgiveness

The **one-sided forgiveness**.

We must **admit** we are owed an apology.

What the person did to us was wrong. We can never be so spiritual as to say wrong is right.

There can be no healing if we cannot say it was wrong. So we admit we are owed an apology.

We then **accept** the fact – we are never going to get that apology. They will never admit they were wrong.

Thirdly, we choose to **give up our right** to **personally** get the apology.

I am not saying we give up our right to the apology. That would be injustice. We give up our right to get it personally.

And then we **give** that injustice **to God** and ask Him to **collect** the apology for us.

This is the most important for our healing. We can be sure, either in this life or in eternity, that person will have to kneel before God and admit that what they did to us was wrong.

Once we are sure there will be an apology and there will be justice, now we can let go of the person, event or memory. Later, when the injustice comes back to our mind, picture the person on their knees in God's presence, admitting their wrong. While you have that picture, thank God for the justice He **will** get for you.

The book of Obadiah is all about bitterness and the way it can destroy us and the people around us. We can never escape injustice in this life. But we can escape the root of bitterness, by using the provisions God has made for us.

EXTRA INFORMATION FOR THE STUDIOUS AND INQUISITIVE

Date of Obadiah's book - 2 opinions

- **IN THE 800's** — he is writing about an earlier invasion by Edom because he does not mention Babylon or the destruction of temple
- **IN THE 500's - 585-580 BC** — he is writing about Edom during the Babylonian invasion because:
 - ...the invasion by Edom in the 800's was limited and not significant enough to write a book about it
 - ...other writers give a similar description of Edom's part in Judah's destruction in 586 BC
 - ...verse 19 says Jews *will* occupy Ephraim and Samaria - only in the 500's could this be a promise