

When Your Brother or Sister Endures Trials, Here's How Obadiah Says to Respond

A prominent leader in my city went through the tragic loss of a beloved child in an unexpectedly horrific accident that shook the whole family. I was privy to the details of the case since my father was the local investigating officer, and his dignified, compassionate handling of it earned him the grateful respect of the leader and his family. As I followed the nuances of the case and pondered on it, I noticed the reaction of various people to the incident. Some were openly sympathetic and empathetic; others were noncommittal, though they felt sorry for his loss; and others were hostile and took the opportunity to voice negative comments and analyses of the distressing disaster. I happened to be reading the book of Obadiah, and the Holy Spirit taught me the right thing to do when such situations happen around us.

The book of Obadiah is one of the two smallest books in the Bible, proclaiming God's judgment on the nation of Edom. Edom was made up of the generations of Esau, the brother of Jacob who is father of Israel, and therefore of the seed of Isaac and Abraham. Through the prophet Obadiah, God points out two reasons for judging Edom.

First was Edom's pride in the secure life and living the nation had on Mount Seir, safe from invasion, unlike Israel, who faced different battles and foreign rule because of God's judgments on the nation's unfaithfulness to Him and His commandments (Obad. 3-5). The second reason God placed His judgment on the people of Edom was their attitude toward and action against Israel, the generation of its brother Jacob, in the day of their trouble (Obad. 10-14).

God accuses the people of Edom of standing aloof while strangers carried off Israel's wealth, being just a spectator when their brother nation was being pillaged and ravaged, gloating over as well as making fun of Israel's misfortune, commenting arrogantly when everything was going bad for Israel, taking advantage of Israel when their lives were falling apart, making merry about the nation's troubles and wrecked condition, robbing the people of what little they had, cutting off their escape routes and strategies, and, finally, dealing treacherously by betraying the helpless survivors.

Most of us, consciously and unconsciously, react and act in the same way to things that happen to our brothers and sisters in Christ. When calamity or misfortune strikes those around us, how quick we are to point our fingers and say, "They must have done something wrong, and that's why God is punishing them!" When someone is going through certain issues or problems in life, we are like Job's friends, voicing our own opinion about the reason behind the season. When someone has hurt us or been hurtful to us, if something untoward happens to them, we take the opportunity to gloat over their misfortune or feel vindicated.

If a contemporary surges forward in every way, and we are not making the same headway, even though we are equally talented, we feel satisfied when they fall into tough times or hit a rough patch. Some of us may even use the situation to forward our own agenda, making use of their "bad luck" to further our own interests. Others may even take the opportunity to get back at them and thus shut even a possible escape route. Instead of standing by our brothers and sisters in Christ, we take sides with their enemies and add fuel to the fire by airing our own opinions of their situation. Even if we have cause to take offense, let us at least refrain from gossip and be constrained to pray for them.

God honors and upholds relationships, especially familial ones, in a very special way and never condones negative

actions or reactions that would compound the troubles of those we call brother or sister. He will not tolerate us taking the occasion to dig a hole for them to fall or harm them when they are vulnerable. It doesn't matter for what reason God is chastising, pruning or even punishing our fellow believers in the body of Christ or whether they are being put on the spot by their own wrongdoing. It does matter how we react and act when we see our family go through difficulties or when calamity strikes them.

God does not give us the right to pass judgment about why something happened to someone, but pays attention to the intentions, thoughts and the state of our hearts. Even if we have grounds for grievance, we cannot take revenge or stand in the way to throw stones at them as Shimei did when David was fleeing from his son Absalom (2 Sam. 16). We are called to love our fellow believers and to reflect God's nature as well as walk worthy of Him, as the children of our Father in heaven who causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous (Matt. 5:45).

From the book of Obadiah, I noted that God judged and punished the people of Edom for their pride in having a secure life and being free from invasion or chastisement of any kind and for their treatment of Israel during the latter's time of trouble. I learned that I needed to be careful not to imitate Edom when someone in the body of Christ goes through life's tough situations. I saw that God would deal severely with me if I dealt severely with my brother or sister, even if I did have cause to do so. I must withhold my hand and mouth from evil and not indulge in speaking negatively against or acting treacherously toward my brothers and sisters in Christ. God could and would turn the tables on me, for He wants us to uphold the brotherhood (Heb. 13). {eoa}

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