

Dr. Gary Yates, Book of the 12, Session 23, Obadiah

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This is Dr. Gary Yates in his lecture series on the Book of the 12. This is lecture 23 on Obadiah.

Faithful reading of the canon of Scripture forces us to interact with the parts of the Bible that make us uncomfortable, as well as the passages that we love and enjoy talking about God's goodness and God's love and God's mercy.

One of those uncomfortable parts of the canon would certainly be these books in the Book of the 12 that talk about God's violence and God's judgment against the Assyrians in the book of Nahum. And we're going to talk about God's judgment against the Edomites in the book of Obadiah. But Ultimately, in spite of the unpleasant parts that are there, again, I don't think we simply edit out or expunge because they somehow conflict with our modern sensibilities and sensitivities.

We interact with the picture that is there of God, and we learn from it, and we grow through it. And we learn through this the mystery of how God uses evil nations and evil armies and violence and warfare, even in a fallen world, to accomplish, in some sense, his justice until the time there is a final resolution in the kingdom. And God asks us in the midst of this to trust him and to believe in a holy and a righteous God that will do what is right.

And Genesis asks the question, shall not the judge of the earth do what is right? And I think that's ultimately a response that we have as we read the book of Nahum and Obadiah. Even if we cannot understand all of the issues and the theodicy and the problems that are raised there, there is also an incredible promise in these books of salvation. God will deliver his people.

God is sovereign over the nation. This violence will not ultimately prevail, and God will deliver his people. He will bring them out of exile, and ultimately, he will establish a kingdom of peace where swords will be beaten into plowshares.

The Old Testament does not glorify war. It presents war as the thing that God will ultimately deliver humanity from. So, it's important to keep the message of hope and the positive aspects of God's judgment here in mind.

As we look at the idea of God's justice, there are just a couple of other things that I want to point out in terms of Nahum before we move on to Obadiah. We clearly see the idea of God's justice in the book of Nahum in the way that the book speaks of the reversal of fortunes that is going to be brought down upon the Ninevites and the

Assyrians. The terrible things and the horrible things that they have done to other people, we have to see that to understand why God is bringing the specific judgment and violence against them that he is bringing.

Because God is ultimately going to turn on their heads the judgment that they have committed or the wicked things that they have done to other nations. We've seen that even in just reading the Babylonian Chronicle. The echo of what Babylon did to Assyria clearly reflects what the Assyrians did to other peoples.

There are several ways in the book of Nahum that this idea of the reversal of fortunes and Assyria getting its just desserts, that idea is highlighted. Some of the rhetoric, ideology, and imagery that the Assyrians used to speak of themselves are used in the book of Nahum and turned against them to speak of the judgment that the Lord would bring against them. For example, the Assyrian kings often presented their armies and often presented themselves or their gods like storm gods that would overwhelm the people around them, that would overwhelm the people that they conquered and subjected like a storm.

One of the Assyrian kings will talk about being an overwhelming flood that wipes, or Adad, the god of the Assyrians, is a storm god. One of the kings says; I raise my voice, rumbling like a storm. So, to turn that around, Nahum is going to say, no, it's not Adad, it's not the Assyrians.

God himself is a storm. The violence and wicked men are not going to prevail in this. They're not going to win this battle.

That's the hope of this book. God ultimately wins because he is the storm. He is the storm god.

And in the same way that the Assyrians have come against Israel and Judah and the other nations as a storm, that's the way God is going to act against them. Verse four of chapter one says that God, as the warrior, rebukes the sea and makes it dry. He dries up all of the rivers, the mountains quake before him, the hills melt, and the earth heaves before him and the world and all who dwell in it.

So, the Assyrian kings would often talk about defeating their enemies just by the roar of their voices. Well, God is the ultimate storm god, and God is ultimately going to overwhelm the Assyrians. Verse 14 says the Lord has given a commandment about you.

No more shall your name be perpetuated from the house of your gods. I will cut off the carved image. I will make your grave, for you are vile.

And so, the Lord is going to fight against the Assyrian storm gods and he's going to overwhelm them and overcome them. Chapter one verse seven and eight, the Lord is good. He is a stronghold in the day of trouble.

He knows those who take refuge in him, but with an overwhelming flood, he will make a complete end of his adversaries and will pursue his enemies into darkness. As this judgment comes and as this violence and destruction is meted out on the Assyrians, in contrast, God will provide a refuge for his people. Now, what Nahum is speaking here about the overwhelming flood and about God as the storm god directly reverses the judgment that Isaiah had announced against Judah at the hands of the Assyrians back in the book of Isaiah.

Chapter five in the book of Isaiah verses 29 to 30 says this. I'm sorry, let me hold this. The verse I want to read here, chapter eight verses seven and eight.

Chapter eight verses seven and eight says this about the Assyrians. Therefore, behold, the Lord is bringing against them the waters of the river, mighty and many, the king of Assyria and all of his glory. And it will rise over all its channels and go over all of its banks, and it will sweep into Judah.

It will overflow and pass on, reaching even to the neck, and its outspread wings will fill the breadth of your land. So, the Assyrian army, when they came upon Israel and upon Judah, they were like an overwhelming flood that swarmed through the nation. God is going to be the storm god.

God is going to come against Assyria in the same way. Remember that in the description of the siege of Nineveh in chapter two verses one and 10, the enemy that attacks the city releases the levees and the dams that causes the water to flood through the city. It very effectively overturns the judgment of Isaiah chapter eight.

More importantly, it overturns the rhetoric of the Assyrian kings themselves. The Assyrian kings also often portrayed themselves as mighty lions or as lion hunters. We have one royal seal that shows the Assyrian king engaging in hand-to-hand combat with a lion.

There are often reliefs and scenes of the Assyrian kings in Mesopotamia. This goes back to as early as, I think, 3000 BC, where they are portrayed as fighting against lions. The king, being this great lion hunter, spoke of his ability to protect his people against whatever armies or whatever natural enemies might have attacked, the king was able to protect and deliver.

And so, at the very center of this book, remember that there is a taunt against the fallen lion. The city of Nineveh has been like a lion's den. The king has gone out and he has ripped and he's torn his prey and he's brought that prey back to Nineveh.

Often, the enemies of the Assyrians were brought back to the city; they were paraded there, and then after they were tortured, they were executed. Now, all of that is going to be reversed because the great lion is going to die himself. Ashurnasirpal, back in the ninth century BC, said I am a roaring lion.

And so again, it overturns the Assyrian rhetoric and talks about the fact that God is going to make things right. Now, here's the passage from Isaiah 5 that I wanted to read earlier. The Assyrian army is roaring like a lion; like young lions, they roar, growl, and seize their prey; they carry it off, and no one can rescue it.

They will growl over it on that day, like the growling of the sea. And if one looks to the land, behold darkness and distress. So, when Isaiah was trying to portray to the people the horrible judgment and the destruction that was going to come upon the land of Israel and Judah, Assyria was a roaring lion.

Now, in the book of Nahum, as Assyria becomes the object of God's judgment, that roaring lion is put to death. The Assyrian army was known again for its severed heads and dismembered limbs and for stacking corpses and bodies and heads in the front of cities that they had conquered, flaying their prisoners, or impaling them on sticks. Now those piles of corpses and the bloodshed and the violence, now this is going to be inflicted.

There is going to be a reversal of fortunes. And so, we read about this in verse 3 of chapter 3. Horsemen charging, flashing swords and glittering spear, hosts of slain, heaps of corpses, dead bodies without end, they stumble over the bodies. So the Lord is going to make things right.

There is a reversal of fortune in the book of Nahum. And ultimately what Nineveh has done to other nations is going to happen to them. All right.

This idea of divine justice and God executing that and carrying that out also stands behind the message of judgment that we have in the book of Obadiah dealing with the Edomites, who had been Israel's enemies throughout their history. So, the message of Nahum, God is going to deal with Assyria. God is going to judge them for their atrocities against the nations.

The message of Obadiah is that God is going to judge the Edomites for their pride and for their involvement in the Babylonian attack on the city of Jerusalem around the time of the Babylonian exile. Now a couple of things about historical setting and historical background. Obadiah is placed near the front of the Book of the 12.

At the time of the book of Obadiah, there are several different proposals about this. It has been dated as early as the ninth century BC. Part of the problem here is that

we have a number of different conflicts between Israel and Judah and the Edomites that continues throughout their history.

It has also been dated as late as the fourth century BC, which is the time when Edom was finally driven out of their land by the Nabataean Arabs. So, there's a wide range here. Do we date this from the ninth century to the fourth century? Some people have looked at this and have seen the fact that it's near the beginning of the book of the 12 and have seen that as an argument for the earlier date.

But I think what we have going on here is that the book of Obadiah has been placed in the book of the 12 in its particular location for thematic reasons. At the end of the book of Amos, there is mention about God restoring the fallen booth of David so that they might possess the remnant of Edom. That provides a link word and a catchword that leads us into the message of Obadiah and the word of the Lord and the message of God and the oracle that God has concerning the fall of the Edomites.

So, there are questions about the date and the setting of this. There are even questions about the identity of Obadiah himself. The name simply means a servant of the Lord.

I believe that there are 13 different individuals in the Old Testament who are known by the name Obadiah. It's a common name. Probably the most famous of these is the advisor of Ahab whose name is Obadiah.

The interesting thing about him is that Ahab was the most wicked, awful, ungodly king that Israel ever had. Yet his chief advisor, Obadiah, was a servant of the Lord who helped to protect the prophets of the Lord. Some have suggested that the Obadiah that we're talking about here was that particular Obadiah.

However, we probably are looking at a prophet who ministers during the time of the Babylonian crisis. So, the time and the setting, Obadiah is another one of these Babylonian prophets in the Book of the 12 in spite of where the book is located. The Edomites were involved in attacks against Judah, while Nebuchadnezzar was bringing Judah into submission.

What was happening here is that the Edomites looked at the Babylonian invasion of Judah, and as they were conquering Jerusalem, they looked at this as an opportunity to take territory away from Judah down in the south where these two countries bordered each other. Edom took advantage of Judah's weakness as an opportunity perhaps to regain territory that they had initially lost at some point to Judah. Archeological evidence confirms that this kind of conflict was going on between Edom and Judah during the time of the Babylonian crisis.

Letters and inscriptions and a strata from the city of Arad, which was an important fortress in the south, indicate that the military commanders that were there realized that they were going to have to deal with the Edomites. So, the Edomites joined with the Babylonians in helping to inflict punishment on Judah, but they also looked forward to this as an opportunity to regain and take back territory. So that is in all of the conflict that is going on between Obadiah and between Edom and Israel throughout their history.

That is the conflict that the prophets especially are going to focus on. The fact that as the Babylonians were bringing about the destruction of Jerusalem, Edom used that as an opportunity to advance their own advantage and their own cause. So, the Book of Obadiah is written to the discouraged and maybe in some sense the cynical people who are living in exile, again to remind them that God is ultimately going to save his people.

God will ultimately deliver them. God will deal with their enemies. This defeat that has been inflicted upon them is not because the gods of these other nations are superior to them.

God has used these nations to judge them, but God will also defeat them and God will ultimately destroy them. So, there are a number of passages in the Old Testament prophets that talk about Edom's participation in the Babylonian invasion and onslaught of Judah, which is the basis of their judgment. I believe that that's probably the setting and the background that we should see for the Book of Obadiah as well.

The book of Obadiah, a number of verses in the Book of Obadiah, are almost exactly the same message that we have in the Book of Jeremiah in the oracles against Edom that are found in Jeremiah chapter 49. So, there's a connection between the message that Jeremiah preached against Edom during the time of the Babylonian crisis. It's very closely paralleled by the message that Obadiah preaches in his book as well.

Again, we don't know exactly the explanation of why this happens. Does Jeremiah borrow Obadiah? Does Obadiah borrow Jeremiah? Is there a common tradition? Ultimately, we can't answer those questions, but what we do need to understand is that canonically, these two books do echo each other, and they seem to talk about the same crisis. There are some extremely harsh words of judgment spoken against the Edomites in Psalm 137 and some pretty horrible words here, but we understand where they're coming from when we understand this setting and this conflict a little better.

The psalmist says this, Remember, O Lord, against the Edomites the day of Jerusalem. Remember when Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians and how the Edomites

rejoiced in that, used it for their own advantage, and may have even been part of the mercenary troops that Nebuchadnezzar used to besiege the city? As they said, lay it bare, lay it bare down to its foundation.

So that's the crime of the Edomites. That's what Obadiah is focusing on as well. And the psalm says, O daughter of Babylon, doomed to be destroyed, blessed shall be he who repays you with what you have done to us.

So, God is going to mete out justice to the Babylonians for what they have done, but God is also going to mete out justice to the Edomites because they took part in this as well. And so, verse nine says to both of these people, blessed shall be he who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rocks. Okay.

And maybe not a verse that we think about in our devotions too often or want to sing praise courses about, but God is ultimately going to judge these cities with the same type of military invasion, with the same type of atrocities that they have committed upon the people of Judah. Those atrocities are going to be visited upon them. And the people of God look forward to the time when the Lord makes these things right.

And so again, in spite of the violence that's here and in spite of the fact that this is part of the canon, it's uncomfortable for us. It raises questions about our modern sensibilities and sensitivities as we read the text about violence and warfare and all those things. There are legitimate ethical questions to raise, but ultimately, it's a reminder of God's justice and God's punishment of wickedness and evil, hoping that at some point, violence doesn't just keep perpetuating itself.

Warfare doesn't just keep continuing. God acts and intervenes to judge those who do this kind of violence so that ultimately, one day, there will be a kingdom of peace. So, there are references throughout the Old Testament, not just to a long history of conflict between the Edomites as the descendants of Esau and the Israelites as the descendants of Jacob, but there is a specific context of where the Edomites were involved in the events surrounding the Babylonian crisis.

One more passage that we'll look at outside of Obadiah is Lamentations chapter four, verses 21 and 22. And Lamentations is going to reference the Edomites as well. Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom, you who dwell in the land of Uz, but to you also the cup shall pass.

You shall also become drunk and strip yourself bare. The punishment of your iniquity, O daughter of Zion, is accomplished. He will keep you in exile no longer.

But your iniquity, O daughter of Edom, he will punish, and he will uncover your sin. So, ultimately, the Edomites rejoiced in the destruction of Babylon. They rejoiced in the destruction of Judah.

They used it as an opportunity to regain territory for themselves. They participated in the violence. God has seen this and ultimately will bring justice against them.

There are other prophetic oracles against the Edomites. We've already mentioned Jeremiah chapter 49, but we also have them in Ezekiel 25, Ezekiel 32, Ezekiel 35, and Joel chapter 3. Amos talks about how the fallen house of David will ultimately possess the remnant of Edom. So, this is a recurring theme throughout the prophetic literature.

Now, as we look at the specifics of the book of Obadiah itself, there are going to be two specific reasons why God is going to bring judgment against this people. We've already sort of raised this. But the first specific reason, and I think in the first part of the book in verses one to nine, God is going to bring judgment against the Edomites for their excessive pride.

God is going to bring judgment against the Edomites for their excessive pride. So, we asked the question, well, this was a small nation. Why were they such a proud and proudful people? Well, they were proud because they believed that the geographical features of their land made them invulnerable to enemy attack.

It was a mountainous area where they believed that they had a natural fortress and fortification against their enemies. The name Edom, which means something that is red and is related to redness, has to do with the redness of the rocks and the mountains that are there. But because of these crags and these cliffs and these mountains, the Edomites believed that they could hide out there and that they were invulnerable to enemy attack.

So, it says in verse three, the pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rocks. That was the source of their pride. You who live in your lofty dwelling and who say in your heart, who will bring me down to the ground? Though you soar aloft like the eagle, though your nest is set among the stars, from there, the Lord says, I will bring you down.

Their mountains and their rocks and their cliffs and their crags and their fortresses are not going to protect them because those things are not going to keep the Lord from bringing them down. The Babylonian army is going to encroach there because God will enable them to do this. And part of what you see in the opening verses of the book of Obadiah, as it talks about the judgment of Edom's pride, is that there is a chiasmic structure here where the book begins by talking about the Lord being the one that assaults Edom, verses two to four.

Then, there is an enemy army that assaults Edom, verses five to seven. But then we come back in verses eight and nine to the Lord being the one who brings this attack and this assault against them. So, in verse eight, the Lord says, will I not on that day, declares the Lord, destroy the wise men out of Edom and understanding out of Mount Esau?

Your mighty men shall be dismayed, O Teman, so that every man from Mount Esau will be cut off by my slaughter. What this chiasmic structure does is, is that it bookends the invasion of the army in verses five to seven with statements that God is the one who is ultimately going to bring them down. So, this is going to be the end of the conflict between God and the Edomites.

Ultimately, this is going to be the resolution of this conflict that has gone on between Jacob and Esau from the very beginning. Remember, there was conflict between Jacob and Esau all the way back in the book of Genesis. These two brothers are going to rival each other.

Jacob is going to steal the birthright from his brother, and ultimately, he is going to be the blessed one. When that first happens, Esau resolves that he is going to kill his brother for what his brother has done. Then, ultimately, they make peace with each other.

So, part of the reason that God is going to bring judgment on the Edomites is that they have not kept the vow of Esau when he agreed to live in peace with his brother Jacob and the Israelites. So, throughout their history, during the time of the monarchy, there is constant conflict back and forth. David will subjugate the Edomites, and the Edomites will attempt to get free.

We see the Edomites constantly involved in attacks and murder or violence against the people of Israel and Judah until the time of the Babylonian crisis. God is ultimately going to bring Edom down for their pride. But then also what we've already talked about is that in verses 10 to 14, God is going to bring down the Edomites because of their treatment of Israel.

Verse 10: because of the violence that you have done to your brother Jacob, shame will cover you, and you will be cut off forever. On that day, you stood aloof. On the day that strangers carried off his wealth and foreigners entered his gate and cast lots for Jerusalem, you were like one of them.

You participated in the pillaging of Jerusalem and the taking away of its treasures. And on the day of the Lord, you were one of the human armies that attacked Judah or that were involved in this. 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 their distress. Do not enter the gate of my people in the day of their calamity.

Verse 13, and the word for calamity there is Edom, which is clearly, I think, a play on the word Edom. The word day is repeated over and over again here. To emphasize the fact, Judah experienced the day of the Lord with the Babylonian invasion.

Edom was a complicit partner in what happened to Judah at that time. And ultimately the day of the Lord is going to come against the Edomites. And so that's what happens as we see the message of judgment in verses 1 to 14.

We have the reasons for the judgment, their excessive pride, their trust in their geographical location. Then the second thing, their onslaught and their involvement in the destruction of Judah. The day of Judah will now become the day of the Lord against the Edomites.

And so, the last part of the book of Obadiah is a message concerning the day of the Lord that is going to come against all nations. And here's what it says in verse 15, for the day of the Lord is near upon all nations.

As you have done, it shall be done to you, and your deed shall return on your own head. The punishment fits the crime. God meets out justice in all of this.

For as you have drunk on my holy mountain, again, their participation in the fall of Jerusalem. So, all of the nations shall drink continually. They shall drink and swallow, and it shall be as though they have never been.

So, the nations that have participated in this will be wiped out, but God says, I will restore my people. I will restore Mount Zion. Israel went through a day of the Lord.

Judah went through a day of the Lord and was ultimately delivered. Edom and these other nations that are the enemy of God will go through a final judgment, and there will be no restoration. So, the day of the Lord that came upon Judah is about to now come on the Edomites.

The way that Obadiah uses the idea, the concept of the day of the Lord is very similar to what we see in other prophetic books. It seems as if the prophetic vision joins together events that are near and events that are far. There is going to be a judgment that falls upon all of the nations and the Edomites are going to be a part of that.

As Babylon carries out its military aims and goals and objectives, ultimately Edom is going to get swept up in this as well. But it seems as if the prophetic vision here

extends beyond just things that are going to happen in the immediate future. The judgment that fell on Judah and then ultimately on the Edomites and the other people at the hands of the Babylonians is a reminder to us of the final judgment that will involve all nations and that will include all peoples.

Then, that will become the prelude to God restoring his people and reestablishing his kingdom in Zion. Here is the promise. 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.

The house of Jacob will be like a fire and the house of Joseph a flame. So, there is going to be the destruction of Edom and the restoration of Israel. The prophet, again, is like that person looking out on the mountains.

He sees a mountain that is near the fall of the Edomites and the judgment that God is going to bring against them. He looks beyond that into the distant future to see the ultimate restoration of Israel and the judgment of all of God's enemies. That's part of this prophetic vision.

The question is, we've got a promise here that God is going to bring judgment. We have a word I think is given to encourage a discouraged people, to remind the cynical people of Judah who are living in exile that God hasn't forgotten about you. He's going to make things right.

The question is, did this ever really happen? Was this prophecy fulfilled? Here is one of the things that we see as we connect together the different books that are found in the Book of the Twelve. The judgment of Edom is prophesied in chapter one of Obadiah and in the book of Obadiah. The fulfillment of this prophecy is referenced in the final book of the Minor Prophets, Malachi chapter one, verses two to five.

This is part of a dispute between God and his people. At the end of the book of Malachi, after Israel has been through all of these judgments, the Assyrian crisis, the Babylonian crisis, and the deprivation of the post-exilic period, the Lord says to his people, I have loved you. But they respond back to him, how have you loved us? God, you claim to love us.

How do you love us? And so, the Lord's going to respond back to them and answer that. He says, is not Esau Jacob's brother declares the Lord, yet I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated. I have laid waste his hill country and have left his heritage to the jackals of the desert.

If Edom says we are shattered, but we will rebuild the ruins, the Lord of hosts says, they may build, but I will tear down. And they will be called the wicked country and

the people with whom the Lord is angry forever. Your own eyes shall see this, and you shall say, great is the Lord beyond the border of Israel.

The people of Israel say, God, you claim to love us. We want to see evidence of that. You have pounded us with a series of judgments.

How can we know that you love us? And the Lord says, well, I want you to compare what has happened to you with what is going to happen to the Edomites. The Edomites have been destroyed. Their land has been invaded, and they are not going to be rebuilt.

They are not going to be restored. And so, the hope for Israel's future contrasted with the fact that the judgment of Edom was final is again another demonstration of the fact that the Lord loved and had chosen Israel and Jacob, but ultimately rejected Esau and the Edomites. History is going to confirm that God loved his people.

But Malachi is validating for us that the promise and the prophecy that's given in Obadiah, this prophecy did come to pass and this prophecy was fulfilled. Historically, it seems to happen in two stages. Shortly after the time that the Edomites had participated in the Babylonian invasion of Jerusalem, the irony is that the Babylonians had carried out campaigns against the Edomites.

And so, a short time after what had happened to Jerusalem, Edom is going to experience the same thing. Kenneth Hoagland, in his commentary on the book of Obadiah, is going to say this: Edom's destruction was not far behind Jerusalem's. From scattered evidence, both literary and archeological, it is possible to conclude that Nabonidus attacked and destroyed Edom during a campaign against the West in the mid-sixth century.

And so, the Babylonian chronicle, the chronicle of King Nabonidus in 553 BC confirms that in that year, less than 40 years after the time of the fall of Jerusalem, confirms that the Babylonians carried out a campaign against the Edomites. So, the Edomites in their pride, they had taken part in the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem. They had celebrated it.

They had used it for their own opportunistic desires. What they didn't understand is that the same thing that happened to Judah was about to happen to them in the very near future. A second fulfillment of this takes place, I think, later on in the post-exilic period.

It may be what Malachi is talking about here. In the fifth century, the Edomites are finally driven out of their land by the invasion of the Nabateans. Ultimately the Nabateans are going to replace the Edomites in this particular country.

If you've seen the pictures of the city of Petra or ever had a chance to visit there, this incredible city and buildings are built right into the rocks. Petra was built by the Nabateans, the people that ultimately replaced the Edomites that were in the land. Now one further connection with biblical history is that in the New Testament, Herod is referred to and Herod is known as an Edomean.

So, whether that means that he is actually a physical descendant of the actual Edomites or whether he simply lived in this territory, he ultimately is connected to the people that we're talking about in the book of Obadiah and the people who experienced this judgment in the book of Malachi. Ultimately, in many ways, he is an expression of the ultimate Edomite. They are hostile.

They are involved in murder and violence against the Edomites. They betray the covenant of brotherhood. Herod sort of exemplifies that in his own life, and he's connected to this history as well.

Historically, there's one other reference that's kind of interesting regarding the Edomite involvement in the Babylonian invasion of Judah and the attacks that the Babylonians made against the land of Judah. In chapter 27 of the book of Jeremiah, we have a passage that talks about the fact that the Edomites and the leaders of Edom and Judah were involved in negotiations regarding forming an alliance against the Babylonians. What we have in chapter 27 is that a group of envoys from Edom, from Moab, from Ammon, from Tyre, and from Sidon, they come to Jerusalem to consult with Zedekiah and to with his advisors and his military people.

They are discussing the possibility of a military alliance. That conference and that meeting in Jerusalem took place in the year 593 BC. As this meeting was taking place, Jeremiah warned these envoys, warned these ambassadors from these different countries any type of alliance, any type of coalition against the Babylonians ultimately was not going to succeed.

He wears a yoke around his neck and carries it through the city, talking about the fact that God is going to put all of these nations in subjection to the king of Babylon. So, in 593 BC, the Edomites and the leaders of Judah were talking about the possibility of being allies. When Jerusalem was destroyed in 586 BC, the Edomites were enemies, and they joined with the Babylonians.

It is somewhat reflective of the entire history between the Edomites and the Israelites throughout the Old Testament. Now we have looked at this interesting message, interesting historical background. We have talked about two judgments that God carries out in history.

In the book of Nahum, God uses the Babylonians ultimately to judge and destroy the Ninevites. In the book of Obadiah, God uses the Babylonians and then the Nabateans

to ultimately bring judgment on the Edomites. But the question we ask, and sometimes this is just the question you have to deal with when you teach the Old Testament, is who cares? It happened a long time ago.

Why should we be concerned about this? Or what relevance or significance does any of this have just for us as we think about God's dealings either with us or with nations today? I think that there is more in both the book of Nahum and the book of Obadiah than simply a history lesson. The lasting theological message that grows out of these books is that in the same way that God judged Nineveh, and in the same way that God judged Edom in the past, and the way that God has judged other nations in the past, it is a confirmation of God's continued involvement in history. It is a reminder of the final judgment of the nations that will occur in the final day of the Lord.

So, this is not just something that happened historically. It is a pattern of things that will continue into even the eschatological future. God is still sovereign over the nations.

God still holds them accountable for their violations of the Noahic covenant and for perpetrating violence and bloodshed and all of these kinds of things. So, there is a lasting message to the nations. Whenever a nation perpetuates the sin of an Assyria, God holds them accountable.

He will either judge them in history or eschatologically. When the nations perpetrate the crimes that were committed by a people like the Edomites, God holds them accountable. God will judge his enemies and those that oppress his people.

So, there is a lasting message that grows out of that. I think there are some passages that clearly demonstrate this, that we are looking at more than simply a historical message. Nahum chapter 3, verses 4 to 7. I want to go back and read the description of this.

The destruction of Nineveh as a wanton prostitute because of the way that she has lured and enticed nations into an alliance with her because of her power and in her wealth and then has used that for her own purposes. The woe that's on Nineveh says this, For all of the countless whorings of the prostitute, her graceful and deadly charms, who betrays nations with her whorings and people with her charms, behold, I am against you, declares the Lord of Hosts, and will lift up your skirts over your face, and I will make the nations look at your nakedness and shame. This is not endorsing violence against women, but it is using a very powerful metaphor to say that this prostitute who has oppressed and enslaved these other nations using her wiles and her charms ultimately will receive the punishment for her crimes.

In Revelation chapter 18, when we look at God's final judgment of the final empire and the empire of Antichrist or the final empire of the last days or the judgment of the empire that was reflected in the first century, the Roman Empire, and how it reflects the enemies of God that will continue to the very end. The fall of Babylon is described like this in Revelation 18. Fallen, fallen is Babylon the Great.

She has become a dwelling place for demons and a haunt for every unclean spirit. Verse three: for all of the nations have drunk the wine of the passion of her immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxurious living. The prostitute imagery there is not primarily talking about sexuality.

Again, it is talking about a great empire that uses its power and wealth as a pretext for inducing and enticing these other nations and then oppressing them and using them for their own purposes. The judgment of Nineveh historically in Nahum chapter three parallels exactly the judgment of Babylon the Great that will take place in the future. There is a pattern here of God historically judging these wicked, evil, and oppressive empires.

God judged the Assyrian Empire. God ultimately judged the Babylonian Empire. The reason that the book of Revelation uses the term Babylon to talk about this empire is that Rome, in many ways, was simply a redo of the Babylonian Empire.

The typology there is, well, in the same way, that God brought down this violent and wicked empire in the Old Testament; whether it was Assyria or Babylon, God is going to do the same thing to Rome. The pattern in the book of Revelation looks beyond the near and the immediate future and what was going on in John's day. It looks forward to a future time and another empire and the continuation of this kingdom of man that is in opposition to God in the future and says, God is going to judge that empire, and God is going to judge the nations in the future for the same reason that he has judged them in the past.

So, there is a pattern that is established here that will work its way through to the very end. The final empire in Revelation 18, whether it's Rome or some empire in the distant future, is not to suggest to us that the Antichrist is going to set up his headquarters in downtown Babylon or in downtown Baghdad, but it is using Babylon as an image and a pattern that is going to continue throughout history. I believe as we look at Micah's chapter 5, verses 1 to 6, we see the same thing.

There's going to be a king that will come from the line of David and he will restore David and he will defeat the Assyrian that comes into the land. When God ultimately uses the Messiah to defeat his enemies at the second coming of Jesus, the enemy there is described as the Assyrians. That doesn't mean that there's going to be a great revival or resuscitation of the Assyrians.

It simply means that the empire and the nations and the enemies of God that God ultimately brings down in the future at the second coming of Jesus are going to be the same kind of empire and the same kind of people that God dealt with when he judged Babylon. I believe this sort of representative use of the nations is also reflected in the Old Testament when we look at the judgment of the Edomites. One of the patterns that you find as you work your way through prophecy and it's kind of a kingdom of peace and prosperity and blessing that God will bring to this people.

Those passages are often clearly juxtaposed with passages that talk about the judgment and the destruction of the Edomites. For example, in Isaiah chapter 34, this blessing that God has for Israel in the future, is followed in Isaiah chapter 35, the judgment of Edom. In the book of Ezekiel, you have the same thing.

When you're talking about chapters 36 and 37 and God raising Israel in the dry bones and all of that, and God making a new covenant and giving a new heart to the people of Israel, that promise is immediately preceded by a statement dealing with the judgment of the Edomites. So, what's this saying? Again, it is not necessarily that the Edomites are going to be the great power that God has to defeat and that Messiah will bring down at his second coming when he rides out on the horse in the battle of Armageddon, but simply the fact that the judgment of the Edomites represents ultimately the judgment that God will bring against all peoples. Isaiah chapter 63 may be the prototypical passage that does this.

Isaiah sees a man coming from Bozrah, from the land of Edom, and he is covered with wine stains. It says that he has been in the wine press, trampling grapes in the wine press. But as this figure, this person comes closer to him, we realize that the figure is Yahweh.

And Yahweh is returning from Edom as a warrior. And what is on his garment are not wine stains, but it is the blood of his enemy. The judgment of God that God will execute against the enemy nations is compared to trampling these nations in the wine press.

Edom is a representative example of that. And when we look at that and we say, gosh, I don't like that image of God. I don't see how that kind of God fits with the God of the New Testament.

I don't see how the God of the Old Testament fits with the God who is the father of Jesus and the love of Jesus. Well, the image that is given us of Jesus when he returns at his second coming is directly taken from Isaiah 63. And now instead of Yahweh being the one who returns from Bozrah with his garment covered in wine stains, it is Jesus himself who rides out on a warrior to carry out the final judgment of the nations and to destroy them in his judgment.

And so, the judgment of Edom in the book of Obadiah, the judgment of Nineveh in the book of Nahum is not simply an historical object lesson for us. It is a reminder of the final judgment. All of God's judgments throughout history are a reminder of a greater judgment that is still coming.

The prophets remind us that the nations are held accountable to the Noahic covenant in the same way that God judged nations in the 8th century, the 6th century or the 5th century before the time of Christ. God also judges the nations today and holds them accountable for fulfilling the dictates of the Noahic covenant. One final issue and just idea that I want to raise here is that popular treatments of prophecy will often raise the question, are there ever references to the United States in biblical prophecy? And sometimes we'll have a popular book like *The Harbinger* that will try to take a passage like Isaiah 9 and say, this is a specific prophecy of the judgment of America.

There are no explicit passages that deal with the United States in prophecy, but these passages apply to the United States in the same way that they apply to every nation. And so what we often do with prophecy in the Old Testament is we make a terrible hermeneutical mistake. We often, as we read the prophets or hear them preaching, we equate Israel with the United States.

And these passages about Israel are ultimately about the United States. That hermeneutical step is a problem for two specific reasons. Number one, it is bad theologically.

God had a specific covenant relationship with Israel that he had with no other nation, including the United States. It is also a bad historical and political metaphor because rather than representing an oppressed nation like Israel, we represent more powerful nations like Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon. We may not be an evil empire in the same way as the Assyrians or the Babylonians, but ultimately, in the way that we perpetuate their crimes and in the way that we follow their oppression, their violence, their greed, their mistreatment, their injustices, ultimately we will be held accountable to God in the same way that they were.

I want to close with a quote from a book that I read dealing with this issue recently, Peter Leithart's book *Between Babel and Beast*. And he talks about how we should view America as an empire in the light of the Bible. Should we view America as the covenant people of God, or are the United States the people of God, and should they be equated with Israel? I think he gives us some important perspective here and I want to close with this.

He says, inspired by Christian values and by the quasi-Christian ideology of Americanism, America is more benevolent than many great powers. But in the end,

we are simply another great power, another nation of the world acting in our own interests while telling ourselves that we have the best interest of the world at heart. Insofar as we want to make the world into our image, we are a Babel.

We are not a beast, but we freely consort with beasts if it will serve our political ends. I wonder how long we can stay in this stage without taking on the bestial habits ourselves. For now, though, America stands between Babel and the beast.

I think that's a good way of estimating this. So, the message for Christians. Remember that you belong to Jesus first and last.

Remember that the church, not America, is the body of Christ and the political hope of the future. Remember that no matter how much it may have served the city of God, America is in itself part of the city of man. Remember that the Eucharist is our sacrificial feast.

American churches have too long disciplined Christians in Americanism, and that makes Christian involvement in the American polity far smoother sometimes than it ought to be. Churches must repent of our Americanism and begin to cultivate martyrs, believers who are martyrs in the original sense of witness and the latter sense of men and women, ready to follow the lamb all the way to an imperial cross. The message that God gives us about Assyria and Edom in the books of Nahum and Obadiah, respectively, are not just historical lessons.

They are powerful expressions of God's dealing with the nations and a reminder of the ultimate justice that God is going to bring against all evil, all violence, and all resistance to his kingdom.

This is Dr. Gary Yates in his lecture series on the Book of the 12. This is lecture 23 on Obadiah.