

Messages from God in Obadiah and Joel

SCOTT HOEZEE

Some people have noted that in the contemporary church, and especially in North America, there is a real wariness, or shyness, about mentioning God's judgment, or the idea God would ever deliver punishments for sin. Instead, some churches want to emphasize God's compassion and love. They want God to be approachable and attractive; and since talk of judgment and punishment is obviously uncomfortable and off-putting, it often gets quietly bracketed out. But as we will see in the new series here on *Groundwork*, that gets almost impossible to do if you read and study the twelve minor prophets. But studying many of these books is exactly what we are going to do in this new series, so stay tuned.

DARRELL DELANEY

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, this now is the first episode in a six-part series that we are going to do on some of the minor prophets. These are the books that round out the Hebrew scriptures, or what we often call the Old Testament. There are twelve minor prophets in the Bible, and although we are doing just six programs, we will end up covering nine of the books, since several programs, including this one, we will do two books. In this episode, we are going to do Obadiah and Joel. We have done series in the past on Jonah and Habakkuk. We will probably do one coming up sometime on Hosea, so that is why we left those three out for now. Indeed, we will see in this program Obadiah is the shortest book of the whole Old Testament, and several of the other minor prophets are also quite brief, at least brief compared to, you know, Isaiah and Jeremiah. I mean Isaiah goes on for well over sixty chapters, right? Obviously, they are much, much longer; and of course, we know that by the time we get to the minor prophets, Darrell, it has been a long time; Israel was not a united country after Solomon died. David and Solomon were kings over a united Israel—all twelve tribes—but then it fell apart after Solomon died, and we had the ten northern tribes that went by the name Israel, and the two southern tribes that went by the name of Judah.

DARRELL DELANEY

732 BC Israel was taken away by Assyria, and we learned this also when we did our Bible survey course, but in 587 BC the southern kingdom was also taken into exile at Babylon; and these exiles are actually harkening way back to when the law was given to the people in Deuteronomy, in the exodus period when Moses was saying to them: Hey, listen; you need to obey the Lord and you will be blessed in the land you are going into; if you disobey the Lord, you will be cursed; and other nations will come in and take you out. So, we are having this situation happen right now, where these foreign countries are coming in, and the prophesying that is happening right now is that situation.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; some of the minor prophets focus exclusively on the northern kingdom of Israel; some focus exclusively on the southern kingdom of Judah. A couple, we will see in a few programs...Micah kind of addresses both; but anyway, that is where we are at; and so, taken altogether, Darrell, these twelve books cover a lot of ground, but they boil down, really, to just a couple of major themes.

DARRELL DELANEY

One of those themes is God's judgment against God's own people; both the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom—Israel and Judah—have gone off the rails, so to speak, when it comes to what God has called them to do. The original plan was to be a light to the nations. Isaiah 49:6 says that they are supposed to be a light to the nations, that the salvation shall reach the ends of the earth; and instead, they become *like* those nations, worshipping foreign gods and forgetting and forsaking the God who has called them to be in the Land.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; they are a covenant people, and covenants have two parties. God, of course, kept his end of the bargain, but Israel repeatedly failed; both the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom failed to keep up their part of the bargain. So, that is one of the major themes of the minor prophets, accusations of injustice in Israel and Judah. That is a very prominent theme in the twelve books of the minor prophets. But Darrell, a second theme to emerge, despite all that, is one of ultimate hope.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, judgment and then hope. This rhythm you will see when we get into the other prophets in this series that God also brings into account; because he is holy, he addresses the issue, but he always gives them a way of escape or a hope that says: I am looking to bring you back to me; I am looking to restore you to me; I am looking to become one with you again; I need you to be my people; I want to be your God. He has always wanted to go back to that, and he allows them the opportunity. He could have wiped them out, Scott...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

He could have just destroyed everybody and started all over, but he wants to redeem them.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Basically, in all six programs in this minor prophets series we will see that hope for restoration comes up again and again; and most of the time, it looks literal, right? Like, literally Jerusalem is going to get put back together; literally, Israel is going to be put back together in the Promised Land; literally, you are going to be a new people. We now look at that, Darrell, and we see that that never quite actually happened, even though there was a new temple built by King Herod, which was the temple in Jerusalem in Jesus' day, that never really was the new dwelling of God the way God had dwelled in the old temple. So, we now know that the ultimate new Israel is the Church. We read this as Christians now through that lens of promise and fulfillment that all of God's words of hope...all of God's words that Israel would be restored...that the temple would be rebuilt...we see that all coming to fruition through Jesus Christ our Lord; and then, through God's pouring out of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, the prophets have always alluded to some aspect of the Messiah fulfilling them and getting their fruition found in him. We do not see, as far as time goes, what happens with Israel being restored, like you said; but the kingdom has now expanded beyond just geographical Israel and the people who were the bloodline of Abraham. Now, it is the spiritual line of Abraham. We are all included into that. Those who believe in Jesus are found in the family of God; and so, he is actually pouring his Spirit out on all people; and we will get to that when we talk about the book of Joel in this series...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

How he is now incorporating it as a spiritual kingdom that will be restored here.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; the Church is, as Paul says at the end of Galatians, in Galatians Chapter 6, as Paul signs off his letter, he refers to the Church as the Israel of God. That, indeed, the Church is the new Israel. Some people call that supersessionism or a replacement theology, and some people take issue with that; you know, some people think the 1948 country of Israel in the modern world has significance, but in the Reformed tradition, we have never quite thought that. We have seen that we are not replacing Israel. The Church is the next logical step, because, as God said to Abram, already in Genesis 12: I am going to found a people through you, but that is not the end of it, that is the beginning...

Darrell Delaney: Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Then, through your descendants, all nations will eventually be blessed; and we believe that has come now through Jesus Christ. But in any event, in the usual ordering of the canonical Bible, these are the last twelve books in the Bible—in the Old Testament, that is. Malachi is the final book, and then after Malachi, Darrell, we enter that long, 450-year intertestamental period that ended when Jesus was born; and then, of course, in the First Century, the books of the New Testament began to be composed.

DARRELL DELANEY

And in just a moment, we are going to dig into the prophecy of Obadiah. So, stay tuned for that.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Darrell Delaney, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, and this first program of a six-part series on the minor prophets.

Darrell, I think it is safe to say that along with a prophetic book like Nahum, that we are going to get to eventually in this series, Obadiah is probably one of the least known books of the Bible, including, even, for people who are pretty faithful attenders of church, and faithful students of scripture; and Darrell, in part, in Obadiah's case, it is an easy book not to know a lot about because it is so short.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, when we were kids, we had this game we did where we would yell out a Bible verse and you would stand up with your Bible, open it, and read the verse; and whoever did that the fastest got the points; and Obadiah was the one they threw in when they tried to catch you, because it was very brief, and you could turn past it quickly. So, because of his brevity, you know, that was kind of one of the one's that they used to try to stump you if you didn't know where it was; but it makes sense, because it is twenty-one verses that it could be easily overlooked. I do not want us to overlook the significance of this powerful book, even though it is short.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is the shortest book in the Old Testament. There are shorter books in the New Testament: Philemon, and then certainly 2 and 3 John are shorter than even Obadiah; but in the Hebrew Bible, Obadiah takes the prize for brevity; but let's listen to how it begins, and then we will fill in the background. So, this is from Obadiah 1...well, there is only one chapter...so, this is from Obadiah verse 1: 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"—²"See, I will make you small among the nations; you will be utterly despised."³The 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?'⁴ Though you soar like the eagle and make your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down," declares the Lord.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, it looks like the primary focus is on Edom. Now, tell us, Scott, who is Edom? Why are we talking about this nation that a lot of people might not pay attention to?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; well, it was an actual nation. It was just southeast of Israel, on the other side of the Dead Sea; and the Edomites, the people of Edom, were the descendants of Esau...

DARRELL DELANEY

Okay...okay.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is significant, because that means there is a link to Israel. Israel were the descendants of Esau's twin brother, Jacob; and of course, Jacob later got named Israel after he wrestled with God at the Jabbok River; and at some point, Esau somehow became known as Edom. So, you've got Jacob and Esau here with Israel and Edom. Well, Jacob and Esau didn't get along very well, Darrell, and neither did these two countries.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; you know, Jacob was the schemer...the trickster...that is exactly what his name means. He was always trying to create a blessing. He was the younger twin. Even when they are coming out of the womb, he is pulling on his brother's heel to try to get out first because he knows...well, he didn't know then...but he knew when he grew up that the eldest son always gets the birthright and the blessing; and so, he used a meal to trick his brother out of his birthright, and also put hair on himself for his senile father, who could not see, to bless him and get the blessing. So, the strife over what they had and fighting for, this dysfunction that they had, it seems like it found its way down into their descendants.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; I have always sort of said that especially when it comes to the early part of Jacob's life...you know, if Jacob ever came to your house, lock up the silver cabinet, because he will walk out with everything before he is done; but like the two brothers, from whom Israel and Edom are descended, so the nations of Israel and Edom didn't get along. There was a huge rivalry. There is some evidence that Israel eventually treated Edom almost like a vassal...like a servant nation...and needless to say, that didn't sit very well with the Edomites. So, there was just constant tension...constant bickering...constant back-and-forth criticisms between these two neighboring countries.

DARRELL DELANEY

I think, practically speaking, Scott, I am so glad that God doesn't omit these dysfunctions and this brokenness out of the Bible, because some of us have family members that we are not getting along with right now, and we have these issues that have become big issues or background issues that they are not even the main issue anymore. We just don't want to hang out with that person; we don't want to go to dinner with that person; we don't want to talk to that person; and the Bible shows that God is still able to work through these dysfunctions and speak into them and help reconcile things, and that should be hopeful for people who have these challenges in their own families.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; there has long been debate as to when Obadiah was written...when did Obadiah do his prophetic work? But there seems to be a pretty clear consensus among Bible scholars that probably this is around the time, or just after the time, of the Babylonian destruction of Judah and Jerusalem, around 587 BC; and at that time, not only did Edom not come to help Judah in its battles with King Nebuchadnezzar, they actively helped the Babylonians; and once Judah was vulnerable and defeated, the Edomites joined the Babylonians in plundering Judah and carting off its valuable possessions. Darrell, we can hear that in Obadiah, starting at verse 10.

DARRELL DELANEY

It says: Because of the violence against your brother Jacob, you will be covered with shame; you will be destroyed forever. ¹¹On 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. ¹²You 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. ¹³You 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.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, that is all against Edom; but then, it is a short book, but after fourteen verses, all of a sudden, Obadiah pivots in verse 15, and he moves away from just focusing on Edom and he focuses against the whole world, and says this, beginning in verse 15: “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. ¹⁶Just as you drank on my holy hill, so all the nations will drink continually; they will drink and drink and be as though they had never been. ¹⁷But on Mount Zion will be deliverance; it will be holy, and Jacob will possess his inheritance.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, it goes from the spotlight on Edom and the Edomites, what they have done because they turned their back on their brother, but now it goes out into: Oh, all the world will be judged for what they have done; and so, it looks like God is actually not going to just center his judgment on one people group, or Edom, in this situation. I mean, everyone has fallen short because of sin, and everyone will be judged.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and interestingly, scholars point out that in Hebrew...now, Hebrew, Darrell, for those who have never studied Hebrew...Hebrew only has consonants in its alphabet...no vowels. They have vowel sounds that they insert between the consonants, and native Israel speakers know how to do that; but what is interesting in Hebrew, Edom and Adam have the same three consonants: Aleph, Dalet and Mem. Now, with Edom, we supply the vowel sounds of ? and O (?); with Adam, we supply the vowel sound of ?; so, you’ve got Edom and Adam. Edom and all people—Edom and all humanity. So, it is kind of an interesting verbal link there, which kind of unites the book of Obadiah. So, the first fourteen verses are all against Edom, and then the last six verses are all against Adam—all of humanity—and there we go. So, you know, Darrell, like all of the minor prophets, there is in Obadiah, severe judgment on evil, promises of severe punishment for evil; but in the end, there were a few rays of hope also in Obadiah. It is a short book, so he doesn’t dwell on that, but there is some hope there.

But in just a moment, we are going to turn to the other book we are looking at in this program, that is the book of Joel, and then we will see what Christians can learn from all of these books today, so stay tuned.

Segment 3

DARRELL DELANEY

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee. We only have one segment...one part of this program left, Darrell, so let’s dive right into the book of Joel. Like Obadiah, a precise date for this book has been disputed, but now many do think that Joel prophesied quite a bit later than Obadiah; probably around the time of Ezra and Nehemiah; and so, that would mean this is the time after Israel had been released from Babylonian captivity. Babylon got conquered by Persia, and then the king of Persia, named Cyrus, told the Israelites: You can go home. We are not going to hold you prisoner here like the Babylonians did. That is the timing of Joel’s work.

DARRELL DELANEY

And so, he goes into this rhythm that we have been talking about for prophets; actually, in this series, there will be a rhythm of judgment and a rhythm of hope; and this is the judgment section part, and this is actually how Joel begins in Chapter 1. It says: ²Hear this, you elders; listen, all who live in the land. Has anything like this ever happened in your days or in the days of your ancestors? ³Tell it to your children, and let your children tell it to their children, and their children to the next generation. ⁴What the locust swarm has left the great locusts have eaten; what the great locusts have left the young locusts have eaten; what the young locust have left other locusts have eaten.

This *locust* language sounds familiar to me. It harkens back to the plagues that Egypt received that Moses had been a part of in the book of Exodus.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; it may have been that there had been a literal locust swarm around the time of Joel that people were familiar with; it was fresh in their minds, and so, he uses that as an image for God's overall judgment and what happened to Israel when the Babylonians did conquer them. That was judgment on Israel's evil. That is why God allowed Babylon to destroy Jerusalem; destroy the temple; cart the people off into exile.

Now, moving on into Joel Chapter 2, he calls everybody to repent before the great and final day of the Lord. This comes up a lot in the prophets. The day of the Lord. You have to repent before that comes:

"Even now," (Joel says, Joel 2:12) declares the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning." ¹³Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, I love that part where it says: Rend your heart and not your garments. So, it is really more than just an external showing. It is more than just something that you do on the outside. We need your heart to resemble that of your garments...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

We need your heart to be torn; we need you to be actually sorry for your sins; we need you to repent.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Don't make a show of it; mean it! Mean it deep down. Repent and mean it from the inside; and if you do, you will be forgiven; because there is that famous line that God is *slow*, actually, to anger—abounding in love.

He has the grace waiting for you if only you can repent and open yourself to that.

By the way, just a curious feature of Joel: He was very familiar with lots of other biblical books, Darrell.

There are not too many books of the Bible that quote and refer to and allude to, as many other Bible books, as what you find in Joel. Included in Joel are references and quotes to Exodus, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and several of the other eleven minor prophets. So, Joel is a student of God's Word; in fact, his whole book is almost like a sermon with multiple Bible passages on which that sermon is based.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is really powerful to see Joel this way, but when we get into the next episode and we talk about Amos, you will see that he doesn't have this background at all. So, Joel is definitely a student of the Word, and he brings in his cross references, if you will. Whatever he says, it kind of echoes back to other parts of scripture, and that is actually the wisdom of the Holy Spirit when he weaves together the Word.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we think of Jeremiah 31 when we hear this famous passage from Joel. This is probably the best-known passage in Joel, in Joel 2: ²⁸"And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters

will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. ²⁹Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.

One of the reasons, Darrell, that that passage is so familiar to us is that was the text of Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost. Peter quoted Joel at Pentecost to say: This is what Joel was talking about. The Holy Spirit has just been poured out. That is now what has been fulfilled.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is beautiful; and thousands of people were saved that day when Peter picks this up and says: Oh, well, Pentecost; this is exactly what this is. He makes it make sense for those who are in his context. And so, I know that we didn't spend a lot of time in this book, but...it is pretty much a whirlwind to think about...but we want to see if we can get some practical application out of both Obadiah and Joel, Scott.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and we will actually see this to a degree in all six episodes of this *Groundwork* series, Darrell, that we will try to shift focus a little bit and widen things out; but the first thing is that the prophetic books like these...they are a reminder that sin is very real, and our holy God cannot just wave it away; he cannot wink at it; he cannot pass over sin as something minor. It is serious, and a holy God cannot *not* render judgment on those kinds of things.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, the radical seriousness of sin is something, because of God's holy character, he will not ignore ever. He is holy; therefore, he has to address sin. If we have seen a judge in court, and the judge let people go, we would say that is not a very good judge. So, the judge has to go by the book; and because God is the Book—the Lawgiver—he is not going to break his own character just because people are going to church or just because people are worshipping; and we will get into this in different episodes, when we come after this to see that fact that God is actually addressing corporate sins and individual interpersonal sins as well because he is holy.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And then the second thing that we take away from Obadiah and Joel is that severe and serious though that judgment is, judgment never ultimately has the last word. Grace will have the last word. God's mercy will have the last word. And in the end, we now...from a New Testament perspective, Darrell...we believe that God took all those punishments that Israel was guilty of...all the punishments that all the nations were guilty of...all the punishment that you and I and all of us deserve, and God laid all that on the shoulders of his Son, Jesus. We could never pay the price for our own sins. Sinning is like digging the hole deeper, and we are never going to get out of the hole, so Jesus threw us a lifeline to pull us out, and the lifeline was his own life.

DARRELL DELANEY

God is always looking to bring us back to him with all the things that are happening; and God does not waste a thing. He can even work in spite of our sin to show us mercy; and if we turn to him, then he can actually redeem us and restore us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; it is not fun to talk about sin and judgment, but against that rather bleak backdrop, the light of grace shines brighter; or as Obadiah and Joel knew, John in John [Chapter] 1 could say that: ⁵The light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot put it out. For that, what else can we say as we always say, but thanks be to God.

DARRELL DELANEY

Thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Darrell Delaney and Scott Hoezee; and we hope you join us again next time as we study the prophetic book of Amos. Connect with us at groundworkonline.com and share what *Groundwork* means to you, or tell us what you would like to hear discussed next on *Groundwork*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

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