

BUILDING A SERMON WITH BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

The Finished Product

According to Jeff Kennet, CHRISTIANS are PEOPLE OF THE PAST. That's what he said – the Premier of Victoria. He said it when Christians raised objections to the new CROWN CASINO in Victoria. To object to that sort of thing, said Jeff Kennet, meant you were OUT OF STEP WITH THE COMMUNITY. How could you possibly object to something that raised so much money for the state. That brought so many tourists to Victoria. Just because it bleeds families dry, just because it sucks people in and addicts them to gambling, so what. If you're a CHRISTIAN, he said, then you're LIVING IN THE PAST. So get down to the Casino, and get with it.

Now I wonder how you feel when you hear people say things like that? That Christianity is a spent force? I'm not sure if my first reaction is to get angry – how dare he say something like that – or to get scared. I mean, maybe he's right. Maybe CHRISTIANITY IS DONE FOR. Maybe being a follower of Jesus, maybe being someone who TRUSTS IN GOD is so old hat that it just isn't worth doing any more.

I was talking to a mum of guy in senior high school yesterday. And she was telling me how her son used to be a believer. But they got to him at school. And he'd been convinced that SCIENCE HAD ALL THE ANSWERS. And Christianity had none. And there's no shortage of people who want to say that – and point the finger along with Jeff Kennet – and say that what we're doing and saying and believing here today has got no place. In the 20th century world.

Well, I want to let you in on the fact that PEOPLE HAVE SAID THAT SORT OF THING BEFORE. It's not the first time people have WRITTEN OFF the people of God.

In fact, I guess they've been doing it all along. But today I want to take a look with you at the book of Obadiah. The shortest book in the Old Testament; one I'm willing to bet you've probably never even noticed.

And as we look at it, we'll see it's about people who have made exactly that same mistake – of writing off God and his people too soon. In exactly the way people do today – and even worse.

Obadiah is an unusual prophet. Because he tells us absolutely NOTHING about himself. In fact, he doesn't even tell us WHEN HE'S WRITING. Most of the prophets give a few clues. Micah, over a few pages, he tells you he's Micah of Moresheth, and he's writing during the reign of King Jotham.

But Obadiah just gets straight into it. Which makes it very tricky to figure out what he's talking about, doesn't it? I mean, no wonder you've never bothered looking at it before, this tiny little book stuck in the middle of the Old Testament, with a mystery writer who doesn't even tell us when he's talking about.

Like I said a bit earlier, one of the things I want to talk to you about today is METHOD. How you actually go about reading your bible when you get to a part like this. And here's where it's particularly important to have an idea of THE BIG PICTURE. The OVERALL STORY of the Old Testament. When you've got that, it's a lot easier to make sense of the little bits. It's like a jigsaw puzzle. The more pieces you put in, the easier it gets to fit in the rest. So let me take a minute to put in a few pieces of the puzzle. And if you take a look at the first diagram on your service sheet it might help.

It's the STORY of the Old Testament. That starts way back in Genesis. Genesis tells us we're living in a world that was designed to be good – but it's been

broken. Broken by the fact that Adam and Eve; and everyone else; has decided to go it alone. That we can decide right and wrong for ourselves. We don't do much of a job of it. And a whole lot of the Old Testament is about THE MESS WE MAKE. When we try to run things without God.

But in the middle of all the mess, God makes some big promises to Abraham. He's the guy on the camel. And God promises that with Abraham he's going to make a whole new start. That from him is going to come a nation. And the nation's going to have a LAND OF THEIR OWN. And from that one special nation, God's going to bring BLESSING. That spreads to all the world.

They're the promises. But along with the promises comes a warning. That if they didn't TREAT GOD AS GOD, if these people of Israel were unfaithful to God when he gave them the promised land, then they'd be punished. Thrown out. Sent into exile.

That was the warning. And the sad news is, they didn't listen. And by the time you get to the end of the story, that's what you'll see. The Israelites thrown out; dragged off into exile. Horrific stuff if you were there at the time. The sort of thing you see on the news going on in Algeria right now – terrorist attacks, a huge army from Babylon marches into Jerusalem, and if you weren't slaughtered in the first attack, you were dragged off to Babylon as a slave.

Israel was reduced to rubble. Because the people of God chose not to be the people of God. They CHOSE TO BE UNFAITHFUL. God said to them, I'll give you the land. But if you go off chasing idols, if you're unfaithful – then there'll be consequences. So off they go into exile. Their temple is in ruins; everything is torn apart. Israel was GONE. And that was how it was for seventy years. Until God said they could come back and start again.

Now you need to know that stuff before you can make any sense of what's going on in Obadiah. And you need to know something else as well. And when we've covered this, then we can get started.

You need to know that EDOM was the country next door. The Edomites were descendents of Esau. And there was like a long standing family feud between the Edomites and the Israelites that ran right back through the family tree.

So here's the scene. Israel. Thrown out of the promised land. Dragged into exile by the army of Babylon. Doing it tough. And Edom. The next door neighbours.

Now here's the big issue. While Israel's facing the consequences for their unfaithfulness to God, what are the EDOMITES doing? That's what Obadiah's all about.

And let me tell you, what Edom has done, is they've written off God. And they've written off his people. What Edom has done, is they've taken advantage of the situation. They've watched Israel's calamity, and they've rubbed salt into the wounds.

The trouble is, they've written off God a bit too quickly. They decide Israel is finished for good. And for that, they're going to pay the consequences.

Because the exile of the Israelites isn't God's last word. God made BIG PROMISES TO ISRAEL. He had big plans. And he's not finished yet. Let's take a look. That's the picture. Israel's been punished. But the story's not over. Edom are the neighbours looking on. So let's pick it up in **verse 1. "The vision of Obadiah. This is what God says about EDOM. We've heard a message from the Lord. An envoy was sent to the nations to say, RISE UP AND LET US GO AGAINST HER FOR BATTLE.**

Edom's about to be in some very big trouble. There's an old saying, PRIDE GOES BEFORE A FALL. And the Edomites have got a bit too big for their boots. Verse 2; in spite of how things look, it's all going to be reversed.

We're at a time when Israel looks like nothing. When Edom looks powerful. But God says it's going to change. "See I will make you SMALL among the nations. You will be utterly despised." They're saying, we're the big league. We've made it to the top, and no-one can ever bring us down. To which God says the words in verse 4. **"Though you soar like the eagle and make your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you DOWN."**

And from verse 5 through to 9, there's a terrible picture of what the future holds. For the people of Edom. Obadiah says, it's going to be so bad you'll wish you'd just been ROBBED.

One of the guys I used to work with; he lived a simple sort of life style. One day he came into the office, and he said, he got home the day before, he found the door of his flat had been forced open; he'd been burgled. He walked in, and there was a note on the table. That said, "We came here to rob the place. But you've got no telly. You've got no stereo. And the whole place was a mess when we got here. So we felt sorry for you. And decided to leave it how we found it."

Sometimes, even thieves show some mercy. That's what Obadiah says to the Edomites. Things are going to be so bad for you, you'd wish you'd just been robbed. **Verse 5; "if thieves came to you, if robbers in the night, oh what a disaster awaits you – would they not steal only as much as they wanted." You'd at least be left with something. "If grape pickers came to you, would they not leave a few grapes." But the land of Edom is going to have nothing left. The land of Edom is headed for extinction. Verse 7; their allies will force them to the border; their friends will deceive and overpower them; they'll be trapped by the people they trust. And they'll have no idea.**

And you know why? You know WHY Edom's going to disappear from the map? The reason comes in verse 10. From verse 10 to 14. And it all comes down to what Edom did. When Israel was facing God's punishment.

I guess they call it the TALL POPPY SYNDROME, don't they. They reckon it's an Australian thing; but you probably find it everywhere. That when people are going well, we sort of take delight in seeing them come down a peg or two. The Alan Bond's of the world. We sort of LOVE TO HATE THEM. There's a smug sort of satisfaction in seeing them end up bankrupt. Or in jail. Maybe even people close to you. You take some sort of secret satisfaction in seeing things go badly for a change. Gloating while they struggle. Because maybe it makes you feel better about YOURSELF. That's GODLESSNESS.

And particularly in the case of Edom. Who have got nothing to be smug about at all. Gloating over the punishment of Israel. Edom has looked on at the destruction of Israel – and they've taken DELIGHT IN IT.

More than that. They're Israel's neighbours. And what they've done is like neighbourhood watch IN REVERSE. Instead of helping; they've joined in the plunder.

Look what they did. Israel's called Jacob here. The name of their ANCESTOR. And God says to Edom, **"Because of the violence against your brother Jacob, you'll be covered with shame, you'll be destroyed for ever. ON THAT DAY you STOOD ALOOF, while strangers carried off his wealth, and foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem, YOU WERE LIKE ONE OF THEM.**

You should not look down on your brother on the day of his misfortune – have you ever done that? - nor rejoice over the people of Judah in the day of their destruction; and on it goes. A terrible picture of how these Edomites took advantage of Israel's day of disaster. Looted with the looters. Waited at the

crossroads and cut down Israelites as they tried to escape. Handed over survivors to the invaders. And did what they could to make Israel's disaster all the worse.

But Edom has made a terrible mistake. Because it's the PEOPLE OF GOD they're toying with. And even in their DISASTER, even in their PUNISHMENT FROM THE HAND OF GOD, Obadiah wants the Edomites to know that the Israelites are STILL THE PEOPLE OF GOD. Which means they're not to be messed with. Even as they're carted off in disgrace – GOD HASN'T FINISHED WITH THEM.

And so he says to the Edomites 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; and just like you drank and partied in your victory on my holy hill; just like you celebrated the fall of Jerusalem, says God, the nations will drink and drink; until finally, there's nothing left.**

They're going to face the consequences. And in the end, all the nations who look so strong, all the voices that pour scorn on Israel, EVERY KINGDOM WILL BE GONE. Except for one kingdom. And **one kingdom only**. Except for one kingdom that's centred on Mount Zion. The mountain of Jerusalem.

Obadiah says, God has FAR FROM FINISHED with Jerusalem. God has FAR FROM FINISHED with Israel. And so when the Edomites have mocked, when they've abused, when they've joined in the pillaging, when they've celebrated at Israel's expense, THEY'VE MADE A TERRIBLE MISTAKE.

Here's what it boils down to. God made a promise. That through Abraham's line, he was going to build a kingdom that brought blessing to ALL THE WORLD. He said to Abraham in Genesis 12, Those who bless you I'll bless. Those who curse you I'll curse. And all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." And for Obadiah, no matter how bad things look, no matter how much Israel has been punished, the promise still stands.

And you'll notice that's how the shortest book in the Old Testament finishes up. Edom has been gloating cause Israel's done it tough. Edom has been cursing the people God has promised to bless. But the tables are going to be turned. Edom's going to end up NOTHING. And the KINGDOM OF GOD is going to FLOURISH. Read it in verse 21. He's said **"There'll be no survivors from the house of Esau." But verse 21. Deliverers will go up on Mount Zion to govern the mountains of Esau. AND THE KINGDOM WILL BE THE LORDS.**

You know, the words of Obadiah were fulfilled in a surprising way. He says Edom would disappear of the map. And it has. I mean, where's Edom today? It's been overtaken and over run so many times, there's not even a trace of it any more. I mean, who goes on holidays to Edom? But there's another kingdom that's grown and flourished, that reaches all over the world. Obadiah says in verse 21, THE KINGDOM WILL BE THE LORD'S. The Kingdom of God.

And when Jesus came, his first public words were these. He said, "THE KINGDOM OF GOD is at hand." The deliverer has finally come. And as he heads up the hilly road to Jerusalem on a donkey, the people wave palm branches. And recognise him as THE DELIVERER. Except he brought deliverance in a most unexpected way. And just a few days later the crown he was crowned with was a crown of thorns. And he's nailed up on a cross as a criminal. And dies there; a substitute. A perfect sacrifice for the sins of his people. Opening the way for us to be RECONCILED WITH GOD. Forgiven. And then he rose. And he ascended. And he rules with God. Over a kingdom that doesn't have borders on a map.

It's a kingdom that might not look much. Just ordinary people like us who have taken Jesus as our King. It's a kingdom that people can laugh at. And mock. Exactly how the Edomites mocked Israel. Exactly how people mocked Jesus himself as he went to the cross.

People seem to delight in seeing Christians doing it tough. People seem to delight in saying the sort of things Jeff Kennet said. "Christians are people of the past."

But will you remember, if you're facing that sort of thing yourself, the TRUTH IS EXACTLY THE OPPOSITE. And we Christians are actually PEOPLE OF THE FUTURE. With our future absolutely guaranteed. Obadiah got it right. He said to the Edomites, you can laugh. You can mock. But God's Kingdom is going to stand for ever. It's going to still be there when you're long gone. And he was right. And he's still right. See, we mightn't look like much. But in the light of eternity, it's going to be very, very clear. And the humblest, most lowly Christian is still going to be there in eternity. Long after the powers of this world will be gone. And Jeff Kennet, if he doesn't repent, will be very much one of the PEOPLE OF THE PAST. While we'll still be there; celebrating in God's kingdom. Because we've hung onto his promises, without letting go.

Will you remember that, next time you're facing a hard time for your faith? Next time someone laughs, next time someone abuses you because you follow Jesus. Next time you're tempted to just give up, because it's tough. Next time you're caught up in the things of this world that want to drag you away from God. There's only one Kingdom that's going to last. Everything else is going to go. Remember, we're not people of the past; we need to be people LOOKING TO THE FUTURE. And holding on to the promises of God.