

**A Sermon by Rev. Martha Shiverick  
Fairmount Presbyterian Church  
June 28<sup>th</sup>, 2009  
Why is this in the Bible? – The Book of Obadiah  
Text: Obadiah 1-21**

**I received an email from Pastor Louise telling me she was intrigued by my sermon series for last Sunday and today on parts of the Bible not normally preached upon. She also was pretty sure she had never preached from Paul's letter to Philemon or the Book of Obadiah. Obadiah is not in our Lectionary readings so we would normally never hear from this morning's text. Last Sunday I shared with you that in the first few readings of the book, it was hard to say why Obadiah had been included in the bible and I asked for your help. Several members of the church in an effort to help me with this morning's sermon emailed me to tell me that they were a descendant of someone named Obadiah. Me too! And when I found out that the name in Hebrew means 'servant of the Lord', I almost got past my initial mental image I had of my relative Obadiah Fishpaw in his overalls on a farm in the central Ohio town of Pickerington with a pitch fork in his hand and of my embarrassment of actually having a relative who was named Obadiah Fishpaw. Well, not quite.....**

**If you would take out your pew Bible and turn to page 678 in the Old Testament you will see a listing of all the prophets in the Hebrew Scriptures. They are listed in chronological order. We know that the prophet Obadiah was one of the later prophets and that he spoke after the fall and destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. He is speaking to a group of Israelites who have returned to Israel to start over and begin anew. The description of the Book says that it is the shortest book in the Hebrew Scriptures (in fact it has been mentioned that my sermon will be longer than the whole Book of Obadiah). It also says it is a song of anger toward the Edomites for their part in the destruction of Jerusalem.**

**If you will now turn to page 858 in the Old Testament of your Bible and read along as we read the word of God as it was prophesized in the Book of Obadiah.**

**The vision of Obadiah.**

**Thus says the Lord God concerning Edom....**

**Those who have been saved shall go up to Mount Zion to rule Mount Esau: and the kingdom shall be the Lord's.**

**The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.**

**Members of our church did try and help me with this morning's sermon. Deborah Nash called to tell me that Obadiah's anger was incredible. It truly is a 'Fire and Brimstone Sermon!' We also read the text in the Prayer Shawl Ministry and Jan Spalding discussed the destruction of the city as sounding like the descriptions of the burning of the South during the Civil War. The powerful imagery of violence and destruction overwhelms you in this small book of the Bible. And that seems to be the only feeling that we get when we first read the prophet's words. His words are harsh and powerful and at times painful to hear. However, this morning I hope to share with you some other insights about the book and the circumstances in which it was written in hopes of making Obadiah's words bring knowledge of God and God's hopes for our lives as God's disciples.**

**The first thing to say about the Book of Obadiah is that it really is a sermon, in that it is taking an older scripture passage and relating it to the time in which Obadiah lived. Obadiah revised an old oracle in light of new social and political realities. Applying older texts to contemporary situations is the job of the preacher. So, from that stand point it is interesting to see that someone from an ancient time made a sermon in much the same way we do today. Just as we continue to look for God's message and use it in our day, preachers in ancient Israel did the same thing as well. The prophet used a passage found in the 49<sup>th</sup> chapter of Jeremiah. Much of the first part of the prophet's words are taken from verses 12-15. But Obadiah uses it to bring a message from the Lord concerning Edom. We know that Obadiah is one of the Israelites to whom he is addressing but we do not know anything else about him. We can also say he was acquainted with earlier prophecies since he uses the older text and that he is a skillful preacher. He uses many methods in preaching still used today such as saying a word repetitively to make a point and he is very good with imagery.**

**Obadiah is also had an important message to the oppressors and the oppressed of his day. He writes to both the betrayers and the betrayed**

**in this powerful sermon. It is written in a time of national crisis and is directed to the innocent bystanders and the survivors.**

**We think the message is most likely to the postexilic community at a service of remembrance for the Temple. We know that there were quite a few of them when the Jews returned to Israel. He is speaking to a group of people who have already experienced God's wrath or as Obadiah put it, 'had drunk the Lord's cup of wrath'. They had experienced the destruction of the city, the temple, and then deportation. And although the message was given to the Israelites who had returned and were starting over after the burning of the temple and the destruction of their city, Obadiah's central concern is Edom. His says in his sermon that Edom will be held responsible for what happened to Israel. The message is to announce the punishment of the Edomites for their part in the destruction of Israel. The day of the Lord is near and it will be a day of deliverance for the Jews and a day of punishments for all the other nations.**

**Edom is a small territory south of the Dead Sea. It was small, only 70 miles from north to south and only 18 miles across. Edom means 'red region' in Hebrew and it most likely got its name from reddish rocks and cliffs in the area. The Edomites settles in the area about 1300 BC which is a little earlier than the Jews and the history between the two countries tells that it was always one of conflict and hostility. Then Jerusalem was captured in 587 BC, the temple was burned, the Jews were carried off by their enemies and all that they had, all that they had built was lost and then finally when it was over it was ransacked by the people of Edom. The Jews began to slowly return and you can imagine their horror when they did. Obadiah was most likely a part of these returning people and it was to them that he spoke. His words were about what had happened to them and what was going to happen to the Edomites because of what they did and did not do. Although they were not one of the nations that came in and destroyed Jerusalem, they did nothing while others did. They stood by while their neighbors were being torn apart and mocked them when the city fell. They did nothing. They did not lift a finger when the invading armies carried off people and their possessions. Then the Edomites gloated and rejoiced at the defeat of Israel and then participated in the looting of the city afterward. Obadiah says that all that they did will now be done to them!**

**Obadiah then addresses the Jews who have returned from exile. He says that they have already drunk from the cup of wrath. Now is the time for the other nations to taste the Lord's punishment. He ends his message with a statement of God's rule and sovereignty. God is in control. God's will will occur. God's kingdom will reign!**

**So the first part of Obadiah's message about the Edomites is that there is no such thing as an innocent bystander. They might have thought they did nothing wrong, but the fact that they did nothing makes them at fault. They didn't participate in the war, but they gloated over the Israelites loss. When the Jewish survivors asked for sanctuary, they turned them in to their conquerors. Obadiah says this is wrong. They should have stood with their neighbors instead of standing by. Obadiah's message is indeed a message that is timeless. When a neighbor suffers and we do nothing, we are the oppressor. The people of God should be with the neighbor. We are the people who are to stand with the sick, the naked, the imprisoned, the hungry and the thirsty. Through Obadiah we know that we are not to be like the Edomites; we are to involve ourselves in the lives of the hurting. We know that it is God's will that we reach out to others instead of turning away from them. God's punishment is a consequence of failing to do so. Our national Church has taken this to heart even in their finances. The Presbyterian investment portfolio is not to be involved in any investments that are morally or ethically at question. AS Obadiah preached, in all we do, either passively or actively, we are held accountable to the outcome.**

**The second message in Obadiah is to the survivors of oppression and of unjust situations. He preaches this to these Israelites who returned to Jerusalem and found their lives shattered, their homes destroyed, and their temple gone. He said that evil will be punished. He preaches knowing that there has and there will always remain a people of God. And he ends by stating the most comforting statement in his final words. That God is in charge, that God is the final ruler. And I assume Obadiah's congregation actually found comfort in his words. They had been through a terrible time, a time of crisis in the history of their nation, but God is still in charge and God will set things right. God's might and power will win in the end.**

**Samuel Pagan, the president of the Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico, says that Obadiah holds challenges for modern believers. The message to us is that we have to be careful with whom we join and which groups with which we associate. We are not to join groups who despoil or whom wound the needy and underprivileged. We have to be careful that our actions or our inactions do not cause pain for others or we invite the judgment of God. We can not remain silent as the Edomites did; we have to speak up against racism and oppression or we will be like the people of Edom.**

**However just as much as this is a sermon on the ethics by which the followers of god should live, this is also a message of hope. God is with the world, not apart from it and God has the ability and will to intervene in history. God is with God's people and we are to work on bringing about God's kingdom. The book ends with an affirmation which is also our affirmation. The Kingdom is the Lord's and it is our part to help in building it. Amen.**