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LET IT GO!

Today's Text: Obadiah

Extracts:

The vision of Obadiah. Thus says the Lord God concerning Edom, "...The pride of your heart has deceived you.... Though you ascend as high as the eagle, and though you set your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down," says the Lord. ... "For violence against your brother, Jacob, shame shall cover you and you shall be cut off forever... But you should not have gazed in the day of your brother, in the day of his captivity; nor should you have rejoiced over the children of Judah in the day of their destruction; nor should you have spoken proudly in the day of distress. ... For the day of the Lord upon all the nations is near. As you have done, it shall be done to you; your reprisal shall return upon your own head" [Obadiah 1, 3, 4, 10, 13]

Joe Morgan was a member of the United States Navy stationed on Pearl Harbor when the Japanese attacked it on 7 December 1941.¹ Morgan survived the attack but he came out of it with a deep hatred of Japan and the Japanese and vowed to avenge by any means within his disposal. So, the day that America threw the world's first atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Morgan rejoiced. After the 2nd World War, Morgan became a Baptist pastor and was posted to Hawaii. He continued to wrestle with his deep-seated anger and hatred for the Japanese. Then in 1956, that is, 15 years after Pearl Harbor, Morgan was invited to a prayer meeting featuring a visiting Japanese missionary. He went reluctantly only to find that the said speaker was Mitsuo Fuchida, the Japanese naval commander who led the attack on Pearl Harbor! He had accepted Christ through the influence of an American war prisoner in Japan. Morgan introduced himself to Fuchida who said to him, "Gomenasai [I'm sorry]." They embraced each other as brothers, no longer as enemies. Morgan's hatred turned into instant forgiveness! On 24 October 2002, Morgan died.

Morgan set his mind free as soon as he let his hatred go. Examine yourself right now. You may be harbouring a long-standing grudge against somebody that has offended you. You have found it almost unable to forget even when you have forgiven. But are you happy? Don't you think it is time to let it go before it is too late? This week's study will help you to do so.

¹ Story is based on the following sources: Joe H. Morgan, "From Fear to Forgiveness: an autobiographical essay on the Pearl Harbor Attack," www.joemorgan.org/pearlharbor_07.pdf and Matt Sanders, "At Pearl Harbor's Arizona Memorial, he tells how God healed his hatred," *Baptist Press*, Dec. 11, 2001, www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?TD=12359

1. Letting go can be hard!

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught His followers on how to relate to their enemies as follows [**Matt. 5: 43-45**]:

You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.” But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

Should we refuse to do what He has commanded, He says that our prayers would be futile for “if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” [**Matt. 6: 14**].

In practice, forgiveness is easier said than done. For example, how many people do you know that bless those who curse them, that do good to those who hate them, or pray for those who spitefully use and persecute them? They will be quite few! Yet, our relationship with Christ and His Father hinges a great deal on our forgiving others. Even when we may claim that we have forgiven others, in that we may not hurt their interests when we are placed in a position to retaliate, can we really and honestly let go? Can we put the hurt behind us and allow the love of God to take over?

We may find it hard to let go for the following reasons, among others:

a) *Our kindness is often rewarded with ingratitude*

It is bad enough that people hurt us, most times without any provocation. An average believer will forgive them if the offence is once, with or without any apologies. However, what do you do if they repay you with ingratitude and even continue to make the hurt worse?

A good example was the case of David and Hanun the king of the Ammonites. Hanun’s father, Nahash, had been kind to David during his wilderness life. When David heard that Nahash had died, he wanted to show kindness to his son by sending his servants to comfort him. However, Hanun treated them as spies and shaved off their beards and cut off their garments, leaving them half-naked and greatly ashamed. You would expect apologies from the Ammonites for rewarding kindness with such a shameful act of ingratitude. They did not. Instead, they sent and hired Syrian forces, numbering 33, 000 men to attack David! He had no choice but to defend his kingdom [**2 Sam. 10: 1-19**].

In most cases, we may not have David's power and authority because we cannot take the law into our hands. Some of us cope by avoiding harm's way. That is, they avoid such people as much as possible. But does that diminish the hurt, especially when rumour peddlers will carry stories between you and the other side to worsen the enmity? Under such circumstances, we may find it hard to let go.

b) *People offend, apologize but continue to offend!*²

Some times, you may be willing to let go, no matter whatever is thrown at you. However, you may come across an offender who apologizes each time s(he) hurts you only to come back soon enough with a worse hurt. That is like trying to reopen an old wound each time it is healed!

Again, let us go to David for an example from the Scripture. King Saul wanted to kill him for no just cause than that he had killed the Philistine giant Goliath and the women of Israel praised the gallantry of the teenager David over that of the king [1 Sam. 17: 31-51; 18: 7-9]. The king "became David's enemy *continually*" because he "saw and knew that the Lord was with David" [v. 28]. As David fled into the wilderness for his life, the king pursued him with three thousand of his chosen army [1 Sam. 24: 1-2]. As the king slept inside a cave, David crept in and cut off the corner of his garment but did not kill him. When Saul knew of this, he apologized to David and left him [vv. 4-22]. Did he thereby leave David alone? No! He kept pursuing him to kill him. A second time, David had the opportunity to kill him but he did not. Instead, he took his spear and water jug [1 Sam. 26: 1-13]. Again, Saul apologized and left David alone. But David could no longer rely on the king's word of repentance. So, he escaped into enemy territory, the land of the Philistines, until the death of Saul, a full year and four months later [1 Sam. 27: 1-7].

David forgave Saul, as his eulogy confirms [2 Sam. 1: 23] but his later battles against Saul's family when he tried to ascend to the throne (which God had anointed him to have) could not make him so easily forget the hurt of the past. How many of us can match David's generosity? When a perplexed Peter came to Jesus, he asked Him, "How often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus replied, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven!" [Matt. 18: 21-22]. He even raised the bench mark when He said elsewhere, "If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him; and if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him" [Lk 17: 3-4].

c) *Apologies are not forthcoming!*

²For more on the subject, read 'Can you truly forgive and forget?' *Weekly Bible Study Series*, Vol. 8, No. 12: 3 June 2007; www.bibleresourcecentre.com

We may face a situation where the offending party does not apologize. It could be due to fear of punishment, such as when alleged criminals on trial plead not guilty, or it could be due to pride, or it could be due to envy. In the last case, your success is your offence against them! Therefore, you may not know that you are hurting others with your success, not to talk of apologizing to them. For example, Moses ‘offended’ his brother, Aaron, and sister, Miriam because he married an Ethiopian wife and had superior spiritual gifts over them [**Num. 12: 1-3**]. If God had not chastised both of them, Moses might never have known about it, not to talk of ‘apologizing’ to them.

No matter the circumstances that we face, God expects us to let it go. If we do not, the repercussions are heavy. Therefore, we need to study the subject in greater detail by examining how God treated the Edomites, the descendants of Esau, for not letting go of their hatred against Judah, the descendants of Jacob. That is the subject of the book of Obadiah.

2. Lessons from Esau’s descendants’ relapse into vengefulness

You will recall that Isaac and Rebekah had twins, Esau and Jacob. While Rebekah was pregnant, the Lord revealed to her that two nations and two peoples were in her womb, and that the older would serve the younger. Esau came out first [**Gen. 25: 20-25**]. As the boys grew, Jacob used tricks to obtain the birthright from his brother, Esau. So, the blessings of Abraham passed from Isaac to Jacob. [**Gen. 27: 1-40**]. When Esau threatened to kill his brother after their father’s death, their mother sent him away to live among her people in Syria. It was there that Jacob married and raised a large family. Esau, on the other hand, moved into the land of Seir where he raised a nation, the nation of Edom [**Gen. 32: 3**]. Edom was another name for Esau [**Gen. 25: 30**], and his descendants are called Edomites. [**Gen. 36: 9**]. When it was time for Jacob to return to the land of Canaan, he had to pass through Edom. However, through God’s miraculous work, the two brothers reconciled and Esau forgave Jacob, whose name God had changed to Israel [**Gen. 33: 1-4**].

The prophet Obadiah refers to the mistreatment of the descendants of Israel by the Edomites [**Obad. 10-12**]. In the Scripture, there are two references to the vengeful conduct of the descendants of Esau, the Edomites, against the descendants of Jacob, Israel. The first time was when the children of Israel on their way to the Promised Land from bondage in Egypt sought the permission of the king of Edom to pass through the King’s Highway in his territory. He refused and instead raised a strong army to resist their passage, if necessary. So, Israel had to turn back to take another route [**Num. 20: 14-21**].

The second was during the reign of Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat. Edom revolted against the authority of Judah and made a king over themselves. All efforts made by Jehoram to reestablish Judah’s authority over the Edomites failed.

It coincided with the time that the king of Judah was doing what was wrong in God's sight, for which God had sent the prophet Elijah to warn him. At the same time, attacks against Judah came from the Philistines, the Arabians and the Ethiopians [2 Chron. 21: 8-17]. Obadiah suggests that during those attacks, the Edomites actively joined the foreigners to hurt their brother, Jacob's descendants for "violence against {their} brother Jacob, ...in the day {they} stood on the other side- in the day that strangers carried captive {Jacob's} forces, when foreigners entered his gates, and cast lots for Jerusalem- even {they} were as one of them" [Obad. 10-11].

God saw the actions of the Edomites, the descendants of Esau, as vengeance against the descendants of Jacob. But, as we saw earlier, the two brothers had reconciled. So, if Esau's descendants many generations down the line still harboured vengeance and hatred, it suggests that they had not let go. Esau's forgiveness of Jacob had been mere lip service or Esau's descendants had been re-infected by vengeance. Hatred and vengeance had been passed on from generation to generation.

So, for not letting go, God pronounced the following judgment on the Edomites:

- They would be brought down from their lofty heights and Edom would become "small among the nations" [Obad. 2-4]
- Shame would cover them and they would be cut off forever [v. 10]
- For rejoicing in the day of Judah's calamity and distress and for aiding and abetting the foreign invaders of their brother's territory, it would be done to Edom as it had done to Judah [vv. 12-15]
- The house of Esau would be stubble and "no survivor {would} remain of the house of Esau [v. 18]

As for Jacob, the object of vengeance, his house would "possess their possession" [v. 17]. The one who refused to let go lost everything. That is a big lesson for us all.

3. Conclusion: Let go and let God!

We learn from this study that you have not forgiven unless and until you have let go. You may have said it with your mouth that you have forgiven. You may have helped those who have hurt you when you were in a position to pay them back. But if you still recall your hurt with so much bitterness, you have not let go. You are still allowing your past hurt to eat you up. Here is what you are doing to yourself:

You are holding God's hand from judging the case against your enemies by acting as the prosecutor, jury and judge *at the same time!* Why would you hand over criminals to the police and the judge whereas you would not allow God to avenge

for you as He has promised? God says, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay” [**Rom. 12: 19**].

You are holding up your own blessings! Jesus has said, “If you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” [**Matt. 6: 14**]. Everyday, you ask God to forgive you your sins. The word of God says, “The Lord is far from the wicked, but He hears the prayer of the righteous” [**Prov. 15: 29**]. The wicked are those who do not do what God asks them to do [**Matt. 7: 22-23**]. The righteous are those who live by faith [**Rom. 4: 1-4**]. The burden is on the offended party to forgive, *irrespective of what the offender does*. When you refuse to let go, you are disobeying God. Therefore, you are tying up your own blessings.

Nevertheless, letting go is *a learning process* which no one can underrate. Here are some guidelines to assist you to do it:

- *Know the truth of God that can set you free.* That is the standard by which to measure your reactions to the hurt and persecution that you face each day. It also helps you to know that you are not in the wrong because sometimes, people you call your enemies may merely be reacting to your own evil designs against them.
- *Pray for your enemies and persecutors.* Your prayer is not for God to destroy them! Rather, it is that God should bless them (and heal them of their deficiencies) so that they can take their eyes away from you!

Let it go!