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Our Inheritance

Despite the many prophets that God gave His people to encourage them at the time of the exile, Obadiah has the distinction of being the *First Responder* to God's people's ills in 586 BC when they were sent into exile. However, Obadiah was NOT the first *response*. That distinction belongs with Isaiah who wrote 160 years before the exile!

Isaiah has three distinct sections directed at God's people living in three different time periods:

- Isaiah 1-39 was written to Isaiah's generation in 740 BC.
- Isaiah 40-55 was written to the generation of those first brought into the exile in 586 BC.
- Isaiah 56-66 was written to the generation that would return to Judea in 538 BC.

In this regard, the first recorded words God gave to His exiled people was NOT a message of rebuke... BUT that of consolation!

Isaiah 40:1, "'Comfort, O comfort My people,' says your God."

Accordingly, and not surprisingly, 160 years later that was the message that Obadiah gave to God's people contained three incredible blessings that God deigned to give His exiled people:

- To them belong Relief in the Storms of Life, v. 17a.
- To them belong Deliverance *IN* Trouble, v. 17b.
- To them belong a Commitment on the Part of God to Mature them, v. 17c.

We pick up with a fourth promise: There is an inheritance promised to them by the Lord.

Obadiah 17d, (I'll read the whole verse though our focus is on the last phrase) "But on Mount Zion there will be those who escape, and it will be holy. And the house of Jacob will possess their possessions."

The phrase "possess their possessions" employs the use of one word, two times... מוֹרָשׁ [môrāš]. This is a unique, covenantal word used in Scripture. It is used more than 260 times and denotes one of two complimentary ideas: (1) receiving something as an inheritance OR (2) gaining control over a city or region by conquering and expelling its inhabitants. When used of God's people in relation to God's Redemptive Promises, the word carries both connotations! See, all the way back in Genesis 12 when God entered into a special relationship with Abraham via the gospel (Galatians 3:6-9), the Lord made a series of promises which included these:

- The possession of an inheritance from the Lord (Genesis 12:1; 15:18-19; 17:8).
- Victory over both God's and His people's enemies (Genesis 12:3).

Notice, both concepts are present here in vv. 17-20. Obadiah *started and ended* with the first promise (the inheritance that belonged to God's people, vv. 17b, 19-20); but right in the middle he chose to address the second promise (the victory of God's people over their enemies, v. 18). Accordingly, we are going to begin with the first promise: The promise of an inheritance to the Child of God.

In the Old Testament, "the inheritance" that God initially promised His people in Abraham was the Land of Canaan. In praying of God's people, Moses prayed the following:

Exodus 32:13, "Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Thy servants to whom Thou didst

swear by Thyself, and didst say to them, 'I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heavens, and all this land of which I have spoken I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit *it* forever.'"

In apportioning the land when God's people entered into it under the leadership of Joshua, God said this:

Numbers. 26:55, "But the land shall be divided by lot. They shall receive their inheritance according to the names of the tribes of their fathers."

Speaking of the remnant, God said:

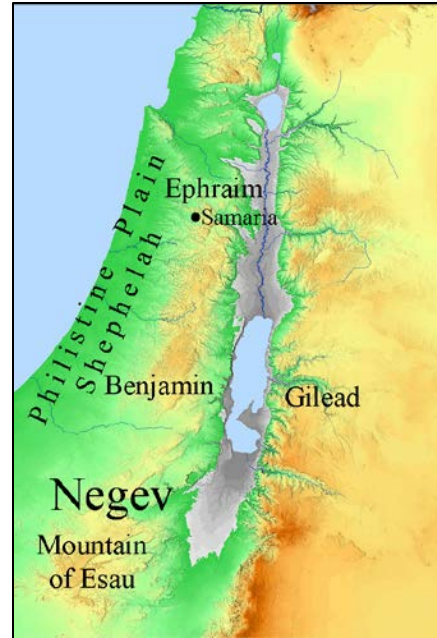
Jeremiah 3:18b, "And they will come together from the land of the north to the land that I gave your fathers as an inheritance."

Now when we enter into the exile and read a promise like the one before us, that "the house of Jacob will possess their possessions" what specific "possession" are we talking about here? Initially, based on Obadiah's words here, we might be tempted to think in terms of the physical land/territory God promised to give to His people.

Obadiah 19-20, "Then *those [of God's people] of the Negev* will possess the mountain of Esau, and *those [of God's people] of the Shephelah the Philistine plain*; also, they [God's people] will possess the territory of Ephraim and the territory of Samaria, and [those people of God in] Benjamin *will possess* Gilead. And the exiles of this host of the sons of Israel, who are *among* the Canaanites as far as Zarephath, and the exiles of Jerusalem who are in Sepharad will possess the cities of the Negev."

Geographically, the focus here is on ten regions/areas/peoples:

1. The “Negev” is that areas south of Judea (where Edom lived after they were kicked out of their homeland by the Arabs).
2. The “Mountain of Esau” refers to the Edomites living in the foothills of the Negev.
3. The “Shephelah” is the low hill area between the coastal lowlands and the central hills of Palestine.
4. The “Philistine Plain” is the Mediterranean coast of Palestine.
5. “Ephraim” references the north area of central Palestine.
6. “Samaria” was the capital city of Ephraim.
7. The territory of “Benjamin” was the south-central part of Palestine.
8. By Obadiah’s time, “Gilead” was a territory directly east of Benjamin, in the Transjordan.



9. The reference in v. 20 to “the Canaanites” is NOT so much a territory, BUT the wicked nations that perennially attacked and molested God’s people (the wicked descendants of Ham). Most likely the connotation here is broad, referencing any nation or enemy who oppressed the people of God.
10. As to “Sepharad,” there is little certainty as to where this might be. It could be Sardis in Asia Minor, though locations in Spain and Media have also been suggested. The point... it is a far away land!

Now again based on this list, it would seem as though God simply was saying that His people someday would be delivered from all oppression and restored to their former land and glory where they would dwell as an independent, sovereign nation.¹

Yet when we come to the New Testament commentary on the Old Testament promise of the inheritance of land, we discover a most amazing truth. The promised inheritance of land in the Old Testament is universally interpreted in the New Testament as a reference to the salvation we have in Christ which will come to its fulness in the New Heavens and Earth. Leslie Allen², speaking of the Old Testament promise of God regarding the inheritance, wrote this:

Certainly, the New Testament transmutes the territorial into the celestial, the material into the supernatural. It holds forth the hope of a heavenly country, Jerusalem, and a temple which Christ has entered and to which the Christian already has some access. ‘Here we have no permanent city, but we look for the one that is to come,’ wrote a Jewish Christian in Hebrews 13:14. Since it is Christians, whether of Gentile or Jewish stock, who are henceforth the heirs of Abraham and the promises made to him, according to Paul’s teaching in Galatians and Romans, it is difficult to see how any Christian can contemplate turning the theological clock back to a limited, pre-Christian point of expectation. (Allen, 1995, p. 172)

Leslie Allen is right on! As much as some might desire otherwise,³ it is clear that the Bible took the Covenantal Promise of Land in reference to the Salvation that ultimately will be enjoyed in the New Heavens and Earth! Consider the words of Peter:

1 Peter 1:3-6: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to *obtain* an inheritance [again this word is used synonymously in the Old Testament for the Promised Land] *which is* imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”

Speaking to the Ephesian elders, Paul said the following:

Acts 20:32, “And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build *you* up and to give *you* the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”

Colossians 3:23-24, “Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men; knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.”

We even see it among God’s people in the Old Testament when the Hebrew writer speaks of the Patriarchs- Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob:

Hebrews 11:13-16, “All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth [The focus of this passage is on God’s people living in the Promised Land early on! Yet even here at this time, God’s people considered themselves to be exiles (cf. Genesis 23:4)!]. For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own [the word here is *πατρίς* (*patris*) which references a “father land”]. And indeed if they had been thinking of that *country* from which they went out [which would have been Mesopotamia which is significant because at the time Mesopotamia was the most advanced and so comfortable nation in the world!], they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better *country*, that is a heavenly one. [Do you understand? Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob received the Promise of Land from God, BUT they did NOT take the promise in reference to the physical territory of Canaan. Rather, they understood it in terms of the New Heavens and Earth!] Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.”

This explains why more of God’s people in 538 BC didn’t return to Palestine when they had the chance. Recall, less than 4% returned!⁴ This should raise our eyebrows. If Palestine was THE Promised Land, why didn’t more return? Either they had become incredibly worldly (which history doesn’t bear out), OR to them the land of Canaan was a shadow a “heavenly” Promised

Land!

So fourthly, the promise God held before His exiled people at this time was that though their sin may have cost them their comfort, their home, and their nation, it most certainly did NOT cost them THE Promised Land. Their inheritance was still secure... in Christ!

Practically speaking, do you see how this would have been such a comfort to the people of God in Obadiah's day heading into exile? It wasn't that in two millennia, their children would return to Canaan and live once again as an independent nation. It was that where they were going:

- Was bringing them closer to their eternal home!
- Would equip and prepare them for life in that world!

This is the message that God gives to every one of His children living as aliens and strangers in this world!

Romans 8:18, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us."

Is this not one and the same as the promise God held before His people here? Though they lost Palestine, God's people would not lose their promised inheritance.

Obadiah 17: "...And the house of Jacob will possess their possessions."

It makes me think of the words of Pippin (in the Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers movie), "The closer we are to danger, the farther we are from harm!" Yes, God's people were leaving the comforts of their life behind them... but in going to Babylon they would be closer to their home! And so it is with any of God's people at any time. Speaking of the God's people living in any wilderness, the psalmist says of God:

Psalms 107:7, "And He led them forth by the right way [that is, the best possible way], that they might go to a city of habitation." (KJV)

In and through every providence, understand that God is leading you to your home!

This brings us to a fifth blessing that God had in store for His exiled people" A glorious reunion.

Obadiah 18a, "Then the house of Jacob will be a fire and the house of Joseph a flame..."

Forget the war language here (we'll discuss it next time), the beginning of this verse referenced a truth that I would guess most of you read over without noticing its incredible significance. Look at the text again: "then the house of Jacob [referencing the Southern Kingdom] will be a fire and the house of Joseph [referencing the Northern Kingdom⁵] a flame..."

Years ago when I initially learned

1. About the non-violent civil war that occurred in Israel in 931 BC (where the nation divided into two: Israel to the north consisting of 10 tribes ruled by Jeroboam and Judah to the south consisting of 2 tribes ruled by Rehoboam⁶) *and then*
2. The fate of these nations, I was taught that the Southern Kingdom of Judah went into exile starting in 605 BC, yet returned in 538 BC. That is why today we call them Jews; they are the remaining people from Judah. In contrast, the Northern Kingdom consisting of ten tribes went into exile in 722 BC to be lost forever! These are the ten lost tribes of Israel!

In fact, when I first heard of this, I thought of an Atlantis-type situation where somewhere today, ten Jewish Tribes are still wandering around somewhere in this world! Yet this is NOT correct! Get this: The 42,360 Jews who did return to Palestine were from ALL the tribes of Israel, NOT just the southern nation. That is the implication here! Isn't that amazing?! Recall the words of Ezekiel:

Ezekiel 37:15-22, "The word of the Lord came again to me saying, 'And you, son of man, take for yourself one stick and write on it, "For Judah and for the sons of Israel, his companions"; then take another stick and write on it, "For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim and all the house of Israel, his companions." Then join them for yourself one to another into one stick, that they may become one in your hand. And when the sons of your people speak to you saying, "Will you not declare to us what you mean by these?" say to them, "Thus says the Lord God, 'Behold, I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel, his companions; and I will put them with it, with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they will be one in My hand.'" And the sticks on which you write will be in your hand before their eyes. And say to them, "Thus says the Lord God, 'Behold, I will take the sons of Israel from among the nations where they have gone, and I will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land; and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king will be king for all of them; and they will no longer be two nations, and they will no longer be divided into two kingdoms.'""

From this passage we understand that when God restored a remnant of His people to Palestine in 538 BC, those who returned were from all twelve tribes of Israel!⁷

That again is which Obadiah references here, "Then the house of Jacob will be a fire and the house of Joseph a flame..." To the exiles of 586, this would have been quite the promise; shocking to say the least! For it implies that where God's people were going in their bondage was to a glorious reunion with their countrymen! Again, while we might easily read over this, there is no way God's people would!

Picture two, inseparable twin girls, I'll call "Betty and Barbra." They look alike (they are

identical twins) and, like most twins, they grew up together forming their own language and so a unique bond. They lived in Vail such that a large part of their relationship revolved around their participation on the Olympic ski team. Imagine if just a year prior the Olympics Betty suffered not only a career ending, but a life-threatening crash. Barb is on the slopes training while her sister lay on life support in a hospital room! Barb understandably would be devastated, bereft, and alone!

Yet what if God sent a prophet to Barb with this message, *“In one year, Betty and Barb will vie for gold at the Olympics!”*?

A couple of thousand years later if we found just the prophecy, it would mean a little to us as the one in Obadiah 18a. Yet the prophecy would have been life changing for Barb, wouldn't it?! Neither would the statement Obadiah made here! Yes, God's people were heading into exile, BUT before them was a glorious reunion with their lost brethren!

Once and again we see that the exile was NOT a set-back in God's redemptive program, BUT a massive leap forward- for therein God's people would be reunited!

Now, living in exile as we are this day, how can we consider this glorious promise and NOT be encouraged by the greater reunion that is in our future when Christ returns?^{8,9} Recall, the Hebrew writer speaking of salvation:

Hebrews 12:23, “[But you have come] to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of righteous men made perfect.”

What an incredible truth: Heaven consists of the “spirits of righteous men made perfect.” Another way of saying it, heaven consists of every child of God that has ever lived, is living, and will live!

Do you understand what this means? When Christ returns, He will reunite all of His people together in the New Heavens and Earth. And thus, as the body and bride of Christ, together “we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians. 4:17)! Describing this glorious time when our inheritance will come in full, Henry Alford wrote these words: “O then what raptured greetings on Canaan's happy shore; what knitting severed friendships up where partings are no more! Then eyes with joy shall sparkle, that brimmed with tears of late; orphans no longer fatherless, nor widows desolate.” (Great Commission Publications, 1990, p. 323)

Oh, let this truth soak in to you. I have known of people who on account of the loss of a loved one — a spouse, a child, a parent — become embittered toward Christ. Amazing! The one they love has been taken by Christ from this state of sin and misery to be with God, fellowship with Jesus, and enjoy the presence of the Holy Spirit! Do you think they are happy? What felicity and joy they must know! And yet, we in our selfishness would hold this against Christ as though the Lord has done something wrong?

Christian, don't miss it! There is not a loved-one in Christ who has died that you will not see again in glory! In fact, if our loved one returned to console us in our bitterness for one minute, what would they say? *What are you doing?! In a blink you too will be with me in glory?! Why are you angry at our Lord?! His ultimate plan involves reuniting us in Glory!*

References

Allen, L. C. (1995). *Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah (New International Commentary on the Old Testament)*. Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Publishing Co.
Great Commission Publications. (1990). *Trinity Hymnal*. Atlanta: Great Commission Publications.

End Note(s)

¹ N.B., the language of conquest, "possess," which we just defined.

² I sincerely apologize to Dr. Leslie Allen for calling him a "her" in my sermon. As I was preaching, for some reason I confused this great scholar with Joyce Baldwin whose wonderful commentary on *Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi* appears in the Tyndale Old Testament Commentary Series. After I preached the sermon, I was quickly told by many in my congregation that Leslie is not a "her" but a "him." Immediately I realized my mistake!! So again, sorry Dr. Allen. You don't need to throw away your man card!

³ I am thinking here of the Dispensationalist.

⁴ cf. Ezra 2:64!

⁵ cf. 1 Kgs. 11:28; Psalms 77:15; Amos 5:6.

⁶ To be precise, as there was no tribe of Joseph (it consisted of two tribes, Ephraim and Manasseh), 10 1/2 tribes went north to form Israel including Ephraim and the 1/2 tribe of Manasseh and 2/1/2 tribes stayed south to form Judah (Judah, Benjamin, and 1/2 tribe of Manasseh).

⁷ cf. also Ezra 6:17; 8:35 where all twelve tribes of Israel are represented.

⁸ Leslie Allen wrote, "Certainly the NT transmutes the territorial into the celestial, the material into the supernatural. It holds forth the hope of a heavenly country, Jerusalem, and a temple which Christ has entered and to which the Christian already has some access. 'Here we have no permanent city, but we look for the one that is to come,' wrote a Jewish Christian in Hebrews 13:14. Since it is Christians, whether of Gentile or Jewish stock, who are henceforth the heirs of Abraham and the promises made to him, according to Paul's teaching in Galatians and Romans, it is difficult to see how any Christian can contemplate turning the theological clock back to a limited, pre-Christian point of expectation." (*The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah*, NICOT, p. 172)

⁹ Leslie Allen also wrote, "The Christian is handed the book of Obadiah as part of the OT heritage he has received with Christ. He will interpret the hope of territorial expansion in terms of his inspired teachers of the NT, finding in it encouragement to possess the land whose horizons he can now understand to be far wider and higher than Obadiah was privileged to grasp." (ibid., p. 172)