

Obadiah 1:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For the day of the LORD is near upon all the heathen: as thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee: thy reward shall return upon thine own head.

Analysis

This verse announces the universal scope of divine judgment and establishes the principle of divine retribution. "For the day of the LORD is near upon all the heathen" (ki-qarov yom-YHWH al-kol-hagoyim) introduces the Day of the LORD—a key prophetic theme describing God's decisive intervention in history to judge evil and vindicate righteousness. The phrase "upon all the heathen" (al-kol-hagoyim, literally "upon all the nations") expands judgment beyond Edom to encompass all nations that oppose God and oppress His people.

"As thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee" (ka'asher asita ye'aseh lak) articulates the lex talionis principle—measure-for-measure justice. The Hebrew emphasizes exact correspondence: Edom's treatment of Judah during Jerusalem's destruction will be precisely replicated in Edom's own judgment. This isn't arbitrary vengeance but divinely ordered justice ensuring that punishment fits the crime. "Thy reward shall return upon thine own head" (gemulka yashuv be'rosheka) uses "reward" (gemul) which can mean either recompense for good or retribution for evil. Here it's clearly retributive—Edom's deeds will boomerang back upon them.

This principle of divine justice appears throughout Scripture. Galatians 6:7 warns "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Jesus taught that the measure we use will be measured back to us (Matthew 7:2). Revelation 18:6 applies this to Babylon: "Reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double

according to her works." Yet while God's justice is perfect and inescapable, the gospel offers an astonishing reversal: Christ bore the retribution our sins deserved, allowing mercy to triumph over judgment for all who believe.

The "day of the LORD" terminology connects Obadiah to the broader prophetic tradition. Joel, Amos, Zephaniah, and Malachi all speak of this day when God will judge the world and establish His kingdom. It has both imminent historical fulfillment (Edom's destruction) and ultimate eschatological fulfillment (Christ's return and final judgment). For Edom, the day came when Nabatean Arabs displaced them and they gradually disappeared from history. For all nations, that day still awaits.

Historical Context

Obadiah prophesied against Edom, descendants of Esau (Jacob's twin brother), who inhabited the rocky region southeast of the Dead Sea. The historical context likely involves Edom's participation in or rejoicing over Babylon's destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC. When Judah faced catastrophic defeat, Edom—their kinsmen who should have shown compassion—instead gloated, looted, and even cut off fleeing refugees (verses 10-14).

This betrayal was especially heinous given the blood relationship between Israel and Edom. Moses had commanded Israel not to abhor Edomites "for he is thy brother" (Deuteronomy 23:7), yet Edom repeatedly demonstrated hostility: refusing Israel passage during the Exodus (Numbers 20:14-21), raiding during the monarchy period, and finally celebrating Judah's destruction. Psalm 137:7 captures Jewish anguish: "Remember, O LORD, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; who said, Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof."

Edom's judgment came gradually. The Nabateans displaced them from their territory, forcing migration to southern Judea (Idumea). By the Maccabean period, they were forcibly converted to Judaism. After Jerusalem's destruction in AD 70, Edom disappears from history—utterly fulfilling prophecies of their obliteration. Their fate demonstrates that God keeps His word: nations that curse Israel will be

cursed (Genesis 12:3), and those who oppose God's purposes face certain judgment.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How does the principle "as you have done, it shall be done to you" shape your understanding of divine justice?
2. In what ways might believers show the same treachery Edom displayed— failing to help God's people in times of trouble?
3. How does the certainty of the Day of the LORD affect your daily priorities, relationships, and moral choices?
4. What does Edom's fate teach about the dangers of harboring bitterness and hostility toward God's people?
5. How does Christ's bearing of our deserved judgment on the cross demonstrate both God's justice and His mercy?

Interlinear Text

כִּי	בָּקָר	וּבָ	יֹם	יְהִי	הַ	עַל	כָּל	עַל	הַגּוֹן	בְּ
H3588	is near		H3117	For the day		H3068	of the LORD	H5921	H3605	upon all the heathen
H7138										H1471
רָאשָׁךְ	בְּ	שָׁהָרָא	שָׁהָרָא	שָׁהָרָא	שָׁהָרָא	לְךָ	לְךָ	לְךָ	גִּמְלָבָר	
H834	as thou hast done	H6213		as thou hast done	H6213	H0			unto thee thy reward	H1576
וְבָ	רָאשָׁךְ:									
shall return	upon thine own head									
H7725		H7218								

Additional Cross-References

Habakkuk 2:8 (Parallel theme): Because thou hast spoiled many nations, all the remnant of the people shall spoil thee; because of men's blood, and for the violence of the land, of the city, and of all that dwell therein.

James 2:13 (Parallel theme): For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.

Matthew 7:2 (Parallel theme): For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.

Ezekiel 30:3 (References Lord): For the day is near, even the day of the LORD is near, a cloudy day; it shall be the time of the heathen.

Micah 5:15 (Parallel theme): And I will execute vengeance in anger and fury upon the heathen, such as they have not heard.

Psalms 137:8 (Parallel theme): O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us.

Jeremiah 50:29 (References Lord): Call together the archers against Babylon: all ye that bend the bow, camp against it round about; let none thereof escape: recompense her according to her work; according to all that she hath done, do

unto her: for she hath been proud against the LORD, against the Holy One of Israel.

Jeremiah 49:12 (References Lord): For thus saith the LORD; Behold, they whose judgment was not to drink of the cup have assuredly drunken; and art thou he that shall altogether go unpunished? thou shalt not go unpunished, but thou shalt surely drink of it.

Joel 1:15 (References Lord): Alas for the day! for the day of the LORD is at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come.

Ezekiel 35:15 (References Lord): As thou didst rejoice at the inheritance of the house of Israel, because it was desolate, so will I do unto thee: thou shalt be desolate, O mount Seir, and all Idumea, even all of it: and they shall know that I am the LORD.

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