

Obadiah

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Obadiah

I. The Author

Although there are various references to individuals with the name Obadiah throughout the Old Testament none is believed to be the author of this book.

Obadiah is one of only two prophets about which no indication is given as to his origin or family background. (The other is Malachi)

The name Obadiah means 'servant or worshipper of Yahweh'.

II. The Book

This book is the shortest in the Old Testament, having only 21 verses. It is divided into three main sections, the first section containing prophecies given to Edom; the second, containing prophecy directed toward Israel and the other nations; and third, how Israel will prevail and expand its kingdom.

The basic message is the condemnation of Edom for pride, arrogance and the unloving attitude expressed toward Judah (Israel).

III. The Time

The time of the writing is the most controversial aspect about the book. The message given by Obadiah refers to the destruction of Jerusalem and it is around this point that all the controversy exists. There are three main opinions about the timing of the writing:

- a) Shortly before the fall of Jerusalem, with the entire book being prophecy
- b) Shortly after the fall of Jerusalem, during their captivity
- c) After the invasion of Jerusalem, long before the captivity

Jerusalem was attacked under various kings:

- a) Rehoboam (1 Kings 14:25-26, 2 Chronicles 12:2)
- b) Jehoram (2 Chronicles 21:16-17)
- c) Amaziah (2 Kings 14:13-14, 2 Chronicles 25:23-24)
- d) Jehoiakim (2 Kings 24:1, 2 Chronicles 36:6-7)
- e) Jehoiachin (2 Kings 24:10, 2 Chronicles 36:10)

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IV. History

The first known inhabitants of this area were the Horims, meaning 'cave dwellers'. (Gen. 14:6) The Lord promised the land to Esau and his descendants and they move in and destroyed the Horims and occupied the land. (Deut. 2:12) The land is named Edom, also called Seir, after Esau. (Gen. 36:6-9) The name Edom means 'red'. The name was given to Esau after he sold his birthright to Jacob for red stew. (Gen. 25:30)

Prior to Esau moving into Edom a blessing and prophecy is given to Esau by his father Isaac. (Gen. 27:38-40) Part of the blessing is the same as that given to Jacob. (Gen. 27:28) But the addition of the prophecy that his generations would live as warriors and they would serve the younger brother produced hatred. Centuries later when Moses leads the Israelites toward the promised land they are refused passage through Edom and are commanded by God not to bother them. (Deut. 2:1-6, Num. 20:14-21)

Nothing is heard from Edom for about 400 years until Saul attacked them (1 Sam. 14:47) and 40 years later when David defeated them and made them servants. (2 Sam. 8:14, 1 Kings 11:15-16) The victory and the following domination of Edom under David is seen as the fulfillment of the prophecy given to Esau by Isaac. (Gen. 27:40) The second part of the prophecy is fulfilled when Edom revolts and gains freedom from Judah under Jehoram. (2 Kings 8:20-22, 2 Chron. 21:8-10) In addition to the revolt of Edom, Judah also came under attack by the Philistines and Arabians. (2 Chron. 21:16-17) The result to Judah was an invasion of Jerusalem and harsh treatment by conquering forces. (Amos 1:6, Joel 3:3-6)

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Verse 1 The vision of Obadiah. Thus saith the Lord God concerning Edom; we have heard a rumour from the Lord, and an ambassador is sent among the heathen, Arise ye, and let us rise up against her in battle.

The 'vision of Obadiah' is basically the title of the book. The book then becomes a recount of the vision told to Obadiah. We are immediately given the authority under which it is written, "*Thus saith the Lord*". This statement of authority or the true authorship is identical to the start of many of the prophetic books. (Hosea 1:1, Joel 1:1, Amos 1:3, Jonah 1:1) This is also similar to the way the New Testament writers started their books, by identifying who they were (1 Cor. 1:1, James 1:1, Peter 1:1, Jude 1)

Along with the proclamation that this is a vision given to Obadiah we are told to whom the vision concerns, Edom.

"*We have heard a rumor from the Lord*" is an indication that Obadiah is not alone in the understanding of the prophecies concerning Edom. His contemporaries, Joel and Amos may be privy to the same 'rumor', meaning report. (Joel 3:19, Amos 1:11-12) Other prophets, although not contemporaries of Obadiah, are given prophecies concerning Edom. (Jer. 49:14-17, Ezk. 25:12-14, Mal. 1:4)

In addition, an ambassador is sent to the heathen nations around Edom to stir them up against Edom. The nature of this ambassador is not known. It may be a human ambassador or spiritual. (1 Kings 22:20-23)

"*Arise ye*" is a term used when action is to be taken, the command is to get moving. "*Let us rise up*" is that more than one is to rise. "*Against her*", 'her' meaning Edom. More than one nation will move against Edom in battle.

Verse 2 Behold, I have made thee small among the heathen: thou art greatly despised.

The Lord calls the Edomites to see what he has made of them. To acknowledge God's sovereignty. The fact is that God, in his sovereignty, has made Edom small, both in territory and in population compared to the other nations around them. They are also despised by the other nations. Not only are they small in size but also in honor. The prophecy given by Isaac was that they would "*live by the sword*". (Gen. 27:40)

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Verses 3 & 4 *The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee, thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high; that saith in his heart, Who shall bring me down to the ground? Though thou exhalt thyself as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down, saith the Lord.*

The reason given for their eminent destruction is their pride. They believed in their heart that no one could bring them down. The reason for their pride is that they thought their location was ideal and impregnable. Petra was the chief city and means 'rock'.

The description is given of a city high in the mountains, a place that is as inaccessible as an eagle's nest and as exalted as the stars. (Is. 14:14, Job 20:4-7)

The pronouncement of doom is given by the Lord for their sin. They put their faith in earthly things. (Lev. 26:19, Prov. 16:18, 1 John 2:16, Rev 18:15-19)

Verse 5 *If thieves came to thee, if robbers by night, (how art thou cut off!) would they not have stolen till they had enough? if the grapegatherers came to thee, would they not leave some grapes?*

Illustrations are given as to the extent of the destruction of Edom.

The first illustration is about robbers or thieves coming in the night. Usually robbers come and take something specific or what they can carry, "till they had enough". What they take is limited, there is always something left behind.

The second illustration is that of grape pickers. After the grapes are picked there are always gleanings left behind. (Jer. 49:7-9, Lev. 19:10)

"How art thou cut off!" is not a question but a statement to get the attention of those to whom the message is directed.

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Verse 6 *How are the things of Esau searched out! how are his hidden things sought up!*

Esau and Edom are used interchangeably. Here the country of Edom is searched out. The things of Edom will be known and sought after. (Deut. 1:21, Josh. 2:2)

Even the hidden things would be sought after. Nothing would remain a secret in Edom (Jer. 49:10)

Verse 7 *All the men of thy confederacy have brought thee even to the border; the men that were at peace with thee have deceived thee, and prevailed against thee; they that eat thy bread have laid a wound under thee: there is none understanding in him.*

Edom will be betrayed by its friends and allies. The nations that were at peace with Edom will turn against them and defeat them. They would be deceived by the same people that sat and ate bread with them. (Ps. 41:9)

"There is none understanding in him" refers to the idea that Edom, while being plotted against and overthrown, had no idea what or why this was happening.

Verses 8 & 9 *Shall I not in that day, saith the Lord, even destroy the wise men out of Edom, and understanding out of the mount of Esau? And thy mighty men, O Teman, shall be dismayed, to the end that every one of the mount of Esau may be cut off by slaughter.*

The Edomites are told what to expect when the Lord's judgment actually takes place. The judgment is phrased as a question asking them if they recognize God's power.

The wisdom of Edom was known throughout the world at that time. They were included as part of the wise men of the east and Egypt during Solomon's reign. (1 Kings 4:30) Eliphaz, a Temanite, was counselor to Job. (Job 2:11)

God would destroy the wise men, if not physically, he would render their wisdom useless. Their wisdom, of course, was worldly. (Jer. 49:7, Cor. 1:25)

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The mighty men of Edom, their heroes, would become demoralized. With a lack of direction from their leadership they would be ineffective in defense of their country. The invaders would eventually overrun Edom and completely destroy it.

Verse 10 *For thy violence against thy brother Jacob shame shall cover thee, and thou shalt be cut off for ever.*

After announcing that a judgment awaits, Obadiah now begins to tell the reasons why. When Esau found out that his father's blessing was given to Jacob, he sought to take his brothers life. (Gen 27:41)

The Israelites were commanded by God not to hate the Edomites, but to treat them as brothers. (Deut. 23:7-8) However, hatred was expressed by the Edomites toward Israel. (Num. 20:14-21, Amos 1:1)

Because of the continuing hatred and violence toward Israel, Edom would be cut off (Ezk. 35:6-9) To be cut off would mean an end to the line of descendants. (1 Kings 14:10, 2 Kings 10:11)

Verse 11 *In the day that thou stoodest on the other side, in the day that the strangers carried away captive his forces, and foreigners entered into his gates, and cast lots upon Jerusalem, even thou wast as one of them.*

The key word in this and the following verses is "day". The word 'day' does not imply past, present, or future. It is more of a reference to some non-specific point in time. To some the events have already occurred, to others it is a prophecy of what will happen. To still others the events are a combination of both history and prophecy.

The indictment against Edom is that they stood by and watched as people were carried away captive from Israel, Jerusalem was invaded, and lots were cast for the spoils of the city. (Joel 3:3)

This indicates that God's sight is on the heart rather than outward appearances. (Heb. 4:12)

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Verses 12-14 *But thou shouldest not have looked on the day of thy brother in the day that he became a stranger; neither shouldest thou have rejoiced over the children of Judah in the day of their destruction; neither shouldest thou have spoken proudly in the day of distress. Thou shouldest not have entered into the gate of my people in the day of their calamity; yea, thou shouldest not have looked on their affliction in the day of their calamity, nor have laid hands on their substance in the day of their calamity; Neither shouldest thou have stood in the crossway, to cut off those of his that did escape; neither shouldest thou have delivered up those of his that did remain in the day of distress.*

These verses continue with specific things that Edom has done, will do, or both. Depending on the viewpoint this is either a rebuke or a warning to the Edomites.

The first rebuke and/or warning is that Edom did not/will not look on Judah as a brother but as a stranger.

Second, as Jerusalem is being looted they will/would take pleasure in its destruction. (Ps. 137:7)

Third, They have/will speak out against Judah. (Ps. 5:19-21, James 3:5-6)

Fourth, they have/will take part in the actual looting of goods from Jerusalem. (Joel 3:5)

Last, they have/would capture and kill refugees trying to escape Jerusalem. Those captured would be turned over to Israel's enemies. (Joel 3:6, Amos 1:6)

Verse 15 *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.*

Having made a case against Edom for its pride and unloving attitude and proved it by showing the nation's actions taken against God's people the pronouncement of judgment is made by the Lord. Not only Edom, but the other heathen nations also have had their day, now the Lord will have his day. "The day of the Lord" is in reference to the judgment of the heathen nations for

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their treatment of His people, Israel. Warnings have been given to Edom as to what would happen should they continue on their present course.

The judgment by God is consistent with Old Testament law. (Lev. 24:19-22, Deut. 19:19,21)

Verse 16 *For as ye have drunk upon my holy mountain, so shall all the heathen drink continually, yea, they shall drink, and they shall swallow down, and they shall be as though they had not been.*

Edom is blamed for taking part in the pillage of God's holy place. "My holy mountain" is in reference to Mount Zion. God's holy mountain was desecrated by them during the fall of Jerusalem. Edom will not be alone in doing this desecration, other nations will do the same. They will swallow, that is, devour the precious things on God's mountain. Because of this they will be destroyed to the uttermost. So much so that it would seem as though they had never existed. (Ex. 35:1-15)

Verse 17 *But upon Mount Zion shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness; and the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions.*

Obadiah turns his attention to his chosen people, Israel. The future is related to the destruction of Edom. Israel, as we have seen, will be overrun. the country ransacked, and its people made refugees. The promise given here is essentially the same as that given to them when in captivity in Egypt. (Ex. 6:7-8, Deut. 4:1)

The deliverance will be to those who are the remnant of God's people, those who believe and return to Mount Zion. (Gen. 45:7-8, 2 Chron. 12:7) Mount Zion is where the Lord has chosen to dwell, to make his presence know to Israel. It was where the temple was built. (2 Chron. 7:1-2, Ps. 9:11) Zion is the place from where God issued his commands, demonstrated his power, and strengthened and delivered his people. (Ps. 132:13-14, Ps. 69:35-36, Ps. 48, Ps. 14:7) Today, we as believers, also come to Mount Zion, a spiritual mountain that is approachable where we can find grace and deliverance. (Heb. 12:22)

"The house of Jacob" represents Israel and they will once again possess the land originally given to them. (Gen. 13:14-18, 26:2-3)

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Verse 18 *And the house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau for stubble, and they shall kindle in them, and devour them; and there shall not be any remaining of the house of Esau; for the Lord hath spoken it.*

Here the "house of Jacob" could mean all of Israel or only Judah. (Ps. 22:23) If Jacob represents Judah then Joseph is meant to represent the northern ten tribes of Israel. (1 Kings 11:28) With this statement there can be no doubt that the prophecy about to be given includes the entire nation of Israel both north and south. (Ezra 6:17)

The two parts of Israel will be used to exercise God's wrath on the heathen. The fire and flame consuming the stubble represents God's wrath. (Ps. 18:7-8, Is. 5:24, Is. 10:17)

Once again Obadiah states that no one will be remaining in Edom when God executes his judgment.

Verses 19 & 20 *And they of the south shall possess the mount of Esau; and they of the plain the Philistines: and they shall possess the fields of Ephraim, and the fields of Samaria: and Benjamin shall possess Gilead. And the captivity of this host of the children of Israel shall possess that of the Canaanites, even unto Zarephath; and the captivity of Jerusalem, which is in Sepharad, shall possess the cities of the south.*

After stating in verse 17 that Judah would once again possess the land promised to Abraham, Obadiah now gets more specific on how this would happen.

"*They of the south*" is in reference to those living in the southern region of Judah. They will expand to the south and inhabit the land now occupied by the descendants of Esau, which is Edom.

"*They of the plain*", that is those in the western part of Judah, would expand and occupy the land of the Philistines westward to the sea.

"*They shall possess the fields of Ephraim, and the fields of Samaria*" is in reference to the land north of Judah. Which group of people is to move into

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this area is not stated but in general Judah would expand north, more specifically into Ephraim and Samaria.

"Benjamin shall possess Gilead" refers to the tribe of Benjamin, who had become part of Judah when the kingdom of Israel was divided. They will expand eastward across the Jordan River and occupy the area known as Gilead.

"The captivity of this host of the children of Israel shall possess that of the Canaanites, even unto Zarephath" refers to those taken captive after the fall of Israel. They will occupy the land originally inhabited by the Canaanites before Moses brought the children of Israel to the promised land. The area of land is probably north of Ephraim and west of the Jordan River up to the city of Zarephath. The location of Zarephath is not exactly known but was located around Sidon in Phoenicia on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. (1 Kings 17:9)

"The captivity of Jerusalem, which is in Sepharad, shall possess the cities of the south" refers to the people of Jerusalem who had been taken captive after the fall of Judah. These people would return to Judah and take possession of the land south of Jerusalem, the land vacated by those who moved south into Edom. This occupied territory was the southern part of the land once occupied by the Canaanites. It is unknown where Sepharad was located.

The prophecy given here by Obadiah is believed to be the same as the vision to Jacob after receiving the blessing of Isaac and leaving home. (Gen. 28:13-15)

Verse 21 And saviours shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be the Lord's.

As in the past, the prophecy is that God will send saviors to his chosen people. (Jud. 2:16, 3:9, 3:15, Neh. 9:27) These saviors, also as in the past, will be appointed by the Lord to bring them out of captivity and to specifically judge Edom.

Mount Zion is contrast against mount Esau. Mount Zion being the holy mount of the Lord and mount Esau being the heathen world. The world would come to acknowledge the Lord as King of all nations.

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The prophecy comes to the logical conclusion that the kingdom would be the Lord's since God's people would have dominion over the land, the land that was once the kingdom of Edom.