

OBADIAH

Outlined Bible

Personal Background

The name *Obadiah* means "Servant of Yahweh" (literally -- "One who serves or worships Jehovah"). This prophecy has the distinction of being the *shortest* book in the OT. There are twelve different individuals in the OT with this name (a very common name), but no indication that any of these other individuals are to be identified with this particular prophet.

Nothing is known about his life, background or personality except what little can be inferred from this prophecy. It is assumed that he was a native of Judah. Others feel he may also have been among the circle of prophets attached to the Jerusalem Temple. The Jewish *Talmud* states Obadiah was not Jewish, but rather an Edomite proselyte God used to rebuke his own people.

Date

In addition to being the shortest book in the OT, Obadiah also "bears the distinction of being the most difficult of all the prophecies to date" (Gleason Archer). His work is ascribed to periods ranging from 845 to 400 BC. There are two major theories:

- **585 BC** --- This is the view held by most liberal scholars. It places this prophecy about a year after the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians.
- **845 BC** --- This is the view held by "a good majority of the evangelical scholars of the 19th and 20th centuries" (Archer). It places the prophecy during the days of King Jehoram (848 - 841 BC) when Jerusalem was attacked by the Philistines and Arabians (with probable cooperation from the Edomites --- II Kings 8:20; II Chron. 21:8-10, 16-17). *This* view seems to be the most probable. (For an excellent defense of this position see -- *A Survey of OT Introduction*, by Gleason L. Archer, Jr., p. 299-303, and *A Commentary on the Minor Prophets*, by Homer Hailey, p. 28-29.)

Literary Relations

This is one of seven OT books which is not quoted in the pages of the NT. However, there are obvious relationships with several other OT books. There is a similarity between numerous phrases found in Joel 3 and Obadiah:

- **Because of violence** - Joel 3:19 and Obad. 10
- **Your deeds shall return on your own head** - Joel 3:4-7 and Obad. 15
- **The day of the Lord is near** - Joel 1:15; 2:1; 3:14 and Obad. 15
- **In Mt. Zion there shall be those that escape** - Joel 3:17 and Obad. 17

It appears that Jeremiah was familiar with the work of Obadiah. Compare Jer. 49:7-22 with Obadiah 1-9. There is "strong evidence that the prophet Jeremiah had read and adapted for his own purposes Obad. 1-9" (Archer).

Historical Background

This prophecy is against the people of Edom. The Edomites were descendants of Esau (Genesis 36:8-9), whereas the Israelites were descendants of Jacob, the twin brother of Esau. Thus, the peoples were very closely related.

From the very beginning, there was enmity between these two brethren --- an enmity which carried over to the nations which descended from them.

- • Jacob and Esau "struggled together" within the womb of Rebekah (Gen. 25:22). In the next verse the Lord tells her, "Two nations are in your womb."
- • There was conflict over the taking of the birthright by Jacob from Esau (Gen. 25:27-34). It was at this time that Esau gained the name *Edom* (meaning "red") --- the color of the stew for which he sold his birthright (Gen. 25:30). Much of the land occupied by the Edomites was made up of dark red sandstone; this was also the color of Esau at his birth (Gen. 25:25).
- • There was conflict when Jacob tricked Isaac into blessing him instead of Esau (Gen. 27).
- • There was trouble years later as the two brothers met (Gen. 32-33).
- • Conflict between the two nations (Edom and Israel) began at the time of the Exodus from Egypt when Edom refused to let the people of Israel pass through their region on the way to the promised land (Numbers 20:14-21).
- • This enmity continued until the time of King David when he put them under subjection to Israel (II Samuel 8:14).
- • During the reign of Jehoram, Edom revolted (II Kings 8:20-22; II Chron. 21:8-10) and set up their own king. It was during this time, about 845 BC, that Obadiah gave his prophecy to the people of Edom.

The people of Edom were continually filled with hatred for Israel. Speaking of these people, Amos 1:11 says, "he pursued his brother with the sword, while he stifled his compassion; his anger also tore continually, and he maintained his fury forever." As a result, Malachi 1:3-4 says that the Lord would utterly destroy the Edomites. They had become the people "toward whom the Lord is indignant forever!" During their later history the Nabatean Arabs took over the territory of Edom and drove them from their land. They fled to the area south of the Dead Sea, and in time came to be known as the *Idumaeans*. Around 120 BC they were conquered by John Hyrcanus of the Maccabees, who forced many of them to be circumcised and to accept the Law of Moses.

During the trial of Jesus Christ, we see the final confrontation --- Jesus (a descendant of Jacob) stood before King Herod (a descendant of Esau).

"By 100 AD the people of Edom had become lost to history" (Homer Hailey). "If you travel today in the region of Edom, you will find nothing but the most-stark wilderness and the most isolated emptiness ... it is one of the most formidable, forsaken spots on earth" (Briscoe). They will "become as if they had never existed!" (Obad. 16)

Occasion

The city of Jerusalem had been attacked by the Philistines and Arabians. The city had been stormed and looted. Edom, who was in a state of revolt, sided with the invading forces and shared in the spoils (Obad. 11). They gloated over Israel's misfortune (Obad. 12-13), and killed or imprisoned those who fled the destruction. (Obad. 14)

The Message

This book is structured around two major themes:

- 1. The destruction of Edom** --- also referred to as *Esau* and *Teman*
- 2. The vindication of Judah** --- also referred to as *Jacob*, *Jerusalem*, and *Mount Zion*

The use of *Jacob* and *Esau* in particular, along with such phrases as "your brother," draws attention to the blood relationship between these two nations. "It is the violation of these ties that occasion both Obadiah's denunciation of Edom and the necessity for Judah's restoration" (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*).

The Great Lessons of Obadiah

John Calvin once remarked that because of the brevity of Obadiah, it did "not suggest as many sermons" as the longer prophetic works. Although this may be true, there are nevertheless numerous lessons to be derived from this book. For example --- when one shares in "the spoils of wrong-doing," even though he may not be an instigator of the crime, by "standing aloof" he becomes "as one of them." (Obad. 11).

- • When someone (even a nation) becomes unjust, cruel and bitter toward someone else ...especially when they're brethren ... they will be punished, and the one wronged will be avenged
- • As a people sow, so will a people reap! "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap!" (Gal. 6:7). The Edomites sought to destroy the Israelites, and were themselves destroyed. (see Obad. 15)
- • Obadiah makes it clear that the idea of a nation being invulnerable is an illusion! Edom felt so secure that they believed no one could destroy them. They built entire cities which were hidden within cliffs, and which could only be reached by narrow passes --- the famous city of *Petra*, which was carved from a mountainside, was in Edom. Their security, however, was misplaced. God said He would destroy them, and history demonstrates how this occurred.
- • The people were proud and arrogant which led them to be self-deceived. "The arrogance of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rock, in the loftiness of your dwelling place, who say in your heart, 'Who will bring me down to earth?'" (Obad. 3). The answer is in the next verse --- "'From there I will bring you down,' declares the Lord."
- • The Edomites had become wise in their own eyes. They had all the answers; had need of nothing; God had been left out of the picture. In the OT there is no mention of any Edomite religion or any Edomite gods. "The Edomites had no allegiance to a god. This has led many scholars to believe that this unusual people were so self-sufficient, arrogant, and self-satisfied that they wouldn't even call upon the name of any kind of god. They believed they had all the answers themselves!" (D. Stuart Briscoe)
- • The Kingdom of the Lord will always ultimately prevail (Obad. 21 --- "And the kingdom will be the Lord's").
- • The ultimate sin of Edom was "a manifest display of lack of brotherliness" (Jack P. Lewis). Edom stood by and gloated over the misfortune of a brother nation. "He who rejoices at calamity will not go unpunished." (Prov. 17:5)
- • God provides a place of escape for those who would turn to Him --- Mount Zion. (Obad. 17)

OBADIAH

Summarized Bible

The prophet Obadiah, who according to tradition, lived in the Assyrian period. His name means "servant of Yahweh". In 597 BC, Nebuchadnezzar II sacked Jerusalem, carted away the King of Judah, and installed a puppet ruler. The Edomites helped the Babylonians loot the city. Obadiah prophesied around 580 BC. (ESV Study Bible) The Edomites were descendants of Esau the twin brother of Jacob.

This is what the Sovereign Lord says about Edom —

- I will make you small among the nations; you will be utterly despised. The pride of your heart has deceived you. (Ob. 1:1-2)
- In that day the Lord, will I not destroy the wise men of Edom, men of understanding in the mountains of Esau? (Ob 1:8)
- You will be cut down in the slaughter. Because of the violence against your brother Jacob, you will be covered with shame; you will be destroyed forever. (Ob 1:10)
- The house of Jacob will be a fire and the house of Joseph a flame; the house of Esau will be stubble. (Ob 1:18)

- You will be set it on fire and consume it. There will be no survivors from the house of Esau. (Ob 1:18)

Key Point from Obadiah

- God's people who do not remain faithfully will also suffer unless they return to Him and live righteously.
- In both the Old and New Covenants those, including His children, who do evil against God's people will suffer either in this physical world or eternally in the spiritual life or both.