

Obadiah

INTRODUCTION

Relations between Israel and Edom were marked by animosity throughout the Old Testament period. The bitterness began when the twin brothers Esau and Jacob parted company in dispute (see Gen. 27; 32; 33). Esau's descendants eventually settled in the area called Edom, south of the Dead Sea, while Jacob's descendants continued the promised line, inhabited Canaan, and grew into the people of Israel. Over the years, numerous conflicts between the Edomites and Israelites developed. The events recorded in Numbers 20:14-21 are an example of this hostility.

This bitter rivalry forms the background to Obadiah's prophecy. Over a period of some twenty years (605-586 B.C.), the Babylonians invaded the land of Israel and made repeated attacks on the sacred city of Jerusalem, which was finally devastated in 586 B.C. The Edomites saw these incursions as an opportunity to quench their bitter thirst against Israel. So the Edomites joined with the Babylonians against their distant relatives and helped to desecrate the land of Israel. Psalm 137:7, Lamentations 4:21, 22, and Ezekiel 25:12-14 decry the participation of the Edomites in the destruction of Jerusalem.

The background of Jerusalem's destruction places the date of Obadiah's prophecy shortly after 586 B.C., the year in which the sacred city fell to the Babylonians. The message likely was given during the period of Judah's exile, as Obadiah warns Edom of God's impending vengeance and assures Judah of the Lord's continued concern.

The prophet through whom the denunciation comes is known only as Obadiah, "Servant/Worshiper of Yahweh." No additional information is available about him. More than ten men bear the name *Obadiah* in the Old Testament. See 1 Kings 18:3-16; 1 Chronicles 3:21; 7:3; 8:38; 9:16; 12:9. One tradition connects the author of the prophecy with the Obadiah identified as King Ahab's steward. See 1 Kings 18:3-16. But Ahab reigned in the northern kingdom from 874 through 853 B.C., a period that likely does not coincide with the dating of the prophecy of Obadiah.

Obadiah's prophecy speaks to people mourning over the ruin of their beloved city of Jerusalem and the deaths of family, friends, and relatives. The inhabitants of Judah who had not been carried off into captivity were few in number and confined to a fragment of the territory they once had claimed as their country. They subsisted on a virtual rubbish heap that once had been their sacred city. The Book of Lamentations rehearses the grief experienced by the people of Judah.

Into this setting, Obadiah brings his message of assurance that God has neither forgotten His people nor overlooked the wickedness of the Edomites. He will intervene to redress the situation, to punish Edom, and to restore His people. His message confronts Edom as a severe word of condemnation, but comforts the people of Judah with the promise of God's continued care, His victory, and their eventual restoration.

Obadiah is the shortest book in the Old Testament. It begins with a heading identifying the prophecy as "the vision of Obadiah" and attributing the pronouncement to the Lord God (v. 1).

The body of the book divides into two major sections. The first (vv. 1-14) is addressed to Edom and announces her inevitable fall. From her position of pride and false security, God will bring her down (vv. 2-4). The land and the people will be pillaged and plundered, the destruction complete and final (vv. 5-9). Why? Because of the violence Edom undertook against his brother Jacob (v. 10), because Edom rejoiced over the suffering of Israel and joined with her attackers to rob and rape Jerusalem in the day of her calamity (vv. 11-13), and because the Edomites prevented the escape of the people of Judah and handed them over to the invaders (v. 14).

The second major section of the prophecy contemplates the Day of the Lord (vv. 15-21). This Day will be a time of retribution, of reaping what has been sown. For Edom, this is a pronouncement of doom (vv. 15, 16), but for Judah, a proclamation of deliverance (vv. 17-20). Edom will be judged severely, but the people of God will experience blessing and glorious restoration to their land. Mount Zion will rule the mountains of Esau, and the kingdom will belong to the Lord (v. 21).

(Spirit Filled Bible's Introduction to Obadiah, Timothy Mark Powell)

Obadiah 1-21

God employs as His "ambassadors" all the powers in heaven and in earth. Not only the good, but even evil spirits and evil men, in spite of themselves, and often unconsciously, while seeking only their own bad aims, are constrained to be the fulfillers of God's purposes. So the Babylonians, moved by God's secret summons, "Arise," eagerly responded, stirring one another up against Edom, "Let us rise up against her in battle." Those great in their own eyes are "small" in the eyes of God, and shall at last be "made" so before all men (v. 2). Those who proudly exalt themselves shall at last be "greatly despised."

As the pride of Edom's heart had deceived him, so 'the men of his peace' also (v. 7) were about to deceive him. The deceit of Edom's confederates was the penal consequence of the self-deceit of his own heart through pride (v. 3). His rock-dwellings, and his city of Petra, nestled on the summit of precipitous crags, seemed impregnable, and fostered his arrogant self-confidence. "Who shall bring me down?" is the language of the carnally secure "heart." How many there are still who, instead of sheltering "in the clefts of the rock" of ages (Song 2:14), rest their confidence of security in the rocky clefts of natural abilities and resources, independent of God! However high these men "set their nest" "as the eagle," God can and will bring them down to the dust in a moment; as Aesop, when asked, 'What doeth God?' replied, 'He humbleth the proud and exalteth the humble.'

In the coming day of the Lord, "the hidden things," not only "of Esau" (v. 6), but of all men, shall be "searched out" and brought to light (1 Cor. 4:5). Every hiding-place of lies shall be laid bare, and the sinner shall be stripped forever of the last rag of pride with which he heretofore has cloaked his shame.

It is a peculiar aggravation to one's fall, when one's own familiar friends not only do not try to avert, but hasten it. As Edom, though the natural friend of Jacob, as being his brother, had, nevertheless, persecuted Jacob, so, in just retribution, Edom's natural friends should be his destroyers. As Edom had turned peace into strife in relation to Judah, so those who were "at peace," and confederate, and who even ate at the same table with Edom, should take advantage of their familiarity to contrive Edom's ruin (v. 7). Thus was fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy, "When thou shalt make an end to deal treacherously, they shall deal treacherously with thee" (Isa. 33:1). Edom's vaunted "understanding" forsook him utterly at the time when it was most needed. Pride goes before a fall: and the proud often pass suddenly from the height of self-confidence to the depth of despair. Overweening self-reliance passes into unreasoning and unreasonable fear. No human sagacity for which Edom was famed can be relied on in an exigency, if men ignore God. The most clever plans often fail from some oversight utterly unaccountable, except on the principle that God can at any moment withdraw from the wise the wisdom on which success depends.

Israel's conduct to Edom, according to the commandment of *God*, had been always regulated by the remembrance of the fraternal relation which subsisted between them. But Edom, on the contrary, had with violence helped the Babylonians in the overthrow of Jerusalem, and exulted in its downfall, thinking that thereby his own prosperity and safety were secured. How just, then, it was that the calamities which they had helped to inflict on their brother should be brought by God on themselves, through the very same Babylonians! The betrayers were in their turn betrayed; and they, who had exulted over the fall of their brethren, were the object of exulting triumph to their former allies, who became their destroyers. "Shame and everlasting contempt" shall at last "cover" all who now glory over the sufferings of the people of God.

There is at hand the great day of the Lord (v. 15), which shall be the day of retribution, not to Edom alone, but to *all* who are aliens to God and to His people. Men's "reward shall then return upon their own head." Chastisements are inflicted upon the people of God for their good now, for a time; eternal punishment awaits their enemies. Let mourning believers and insulting oppressors know that the trials of the godly shall soon end, but the miseries of the ungodly shall be forever.

In the worst times of the Church there is always reserved an "escaped remnant" (v. 17). "Holiness" is to be its final characteristic: and is even in part so now. "Upon mount Zion" Jesus has already appeared for salvation to His people; and by virtue of His death and resurrection the Church goes forth to take spiritual "possession" of the world (v. 17; Matt. 28:19). When He shall come again He shall consummate redemption visibly and manifestly to His saints; and the literal "house of Jacob shall possess their possessions" (vv. 17, 19, 20). "The mount of Esau" (v. 21) shall be abased before mount Zion. God's mount of holiness shall then be exalted above every mountain of human pride. The transfigured saints, with Christ, the antitype to all former "saviors," shall judge the world (1 Cor. 6:2), condemning the reprobates; and, as being king-priests, shall be the mediators of blessing to the nations in the flesh. The dominion long usurped by the prince of this world, and judicially permitted for a time, because of man's sin, shall then cease; "and the kingdom shall be the Lord's." What wise man then can hesitate whether to take his portion with the world and Satan, or with the Church and Christ?

(Bible Commentary, Jamieson, Fausset & Brown)

What relation existed between the Edomites and Israelites?

Num. 20:14-21 2 Sam. 8:13-14 2 Kings 8:20-22

What deceived the Edomites to feel they were out of reach of danger?

Ps. 137:7 Jer. 49:15-16 Obad. 3

What was the one single crime which is laid to Edom's charge that brought ruin upon them?

Obad. 10

What contrast will be seen in the future between Edom and Israel?

Ex. 15:7 Isa. 10:17 Obad. 17 Matt. 3:12 2 Pet. 3:7-13

Will deliverance and holiness in the end time occur on Mount Seir (the prominent mountain of Edom) or Mount Zion? What significance is there to Mount Zion?

Obad. 16-21 Luke 24:47 Heb. 12:22-24