

LESSON 1 ~ OBADIAH

Consisting of only twenty-one verses, Obadiah is the shortest book in the Old Testament. It deals with the bitter rivalry between Edom, the descendants of Jacob's twin brother Esau, and the people of Israel. Obadiah, whose name means "Worshiper of Yahweh" or "Servant of Yahweh," pronounces condemnation against Edom and prophesies their total destruction because of their persistent opposition to God's chosen people.

Author

Obadiah was an obscure prophet who probably lived in the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Nothing is known of his hometown or family, but it is likely that he did not come from the kingly or priestly line because his father is not mentioned in 1:1.

Thirteen men named Obadiah are mentioned in the Old Testament, but none of these can be identified with any certainty as the author of this book.

Date

There are several views regarding the date of the book. Edom's cooperation with foreigners in sacking Jerusalem (vv. 10–14), which forms the historical background to the prophecy, could refer to a number of incidents, of which two are more likely. It may have occurred c. 850 B.C. in the reign of Jehoram (see 2 Chr. 21:8–10, 16, 17) during a period of revolt by Edom when Judah was also threatened by invading Philistines and Arabians. Also possible is a reference to Edomite complicity in the Babylonian capture of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. According to Psalm 137:7, the Edomites applauded the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. The case for this later date is also strengthened by the fact that Obadiah appears to quote from Jeremiah 49 (cf. vv. 1–4 with Jer. 49:14–16; vv. 5, 6 with Jer. 49:9, 10; v. 8 with Jer. 49:7; and v. 16 with Jer. 49:12). Thus, possible dates for the composition of Obadiah are c. 840 B.C., or between the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. and the fall of Babylon to Cyrus in 539 B.C.

Themes and Literary Structure

Though the shortest of the Old Testament books, Obadiah carries one of the strongest messages of judgment. Because of her long history of opposing God's people, Edom's fate is sealed, and there is no possibility of deliverance. God will bring total destruction upon Edom, and there will be no remnant. The book of Obadiah portrays Edom's day in the divine court, complete with arraignment, indictment, and sentence. This prophet of poetic justice describes how the Judge of the earth will overthrow the pride of Edom and restore the house of Jacob. The two sections of this short book are: the judgment of Edom (vv. 1–18) and the restoration of Israel (vv. 19–21).

The prophetic theme of the day of the Lord is prominent in verses 15–21. As in the prophecy of Joel, this climactic day brings both judgment and deliverance. For Edom, this is a pronouncement of doom (vv. 15, 16), but for Judah it will bring deliverance as they experience blessing and restoration to their land (vv. 17–21).

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¹*Nelson's Complete Book of Bible Maps and Charts : Old and New Testaments.* electronic ed. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1996.

Understand The Background

1. The hatred Edom held for their blood relatives, Israel, goes back as far as the birth of Esau and Jacob (literally means “one who takes the heel”, comes to mean supplanter or deceitful, especially in Edom’s eyes). Read Genesis 25:22-34; and 27:1-46
2. The Edomites dwelt in Mount Seir at the south end of the dead sea. This territory is referred to as Idumea. They constantly were against Israel. When Moses led them up from Egypt and requested to simply pass through their land Edom refused and threatened war. Read Num 20:14-21.
3. Edom rejoiced every time Israel suffered. Read Ps 137:7; Is 21:11-12; Jer 25:15-29; Jer 49:7-22; Ezekial 25:12-14.
4. The Edomites history continues through to the period of the Herods. Herod the Great’s father was Antipater of Idumea. However, after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. the Idumeans disappear from history-certainly a fulfillment of the prophecies against Edom.

The Outline of Obadiah

1. Edom Will Be Totally Destroyed , vv. 1-9
2. The Reason For God’s Judgment Upon Edom, vv.10-16
3. Mount Zion (God’s People) Shall Be Delivered and Possess the Land

Study Questions For Obadiah

1. How had the Edomites exalted themselves?
2. What does the Lord say He will do to Edom?
3. Why was the Lord doing this to Edom?
4. What did Edom stand in the crossroads to do?
5. When the Day of the Lord comes upon Edom, what will be her reward?
6. Thought Question: Why is pride deceitful? (Obadiah 3)