

# 4. Obadiah

## Introduction

### The Author

The author of the book is named Obadiah which means “Servant of Yahweh.” Some have thought that this is the same Obadiah that was Ahab’s steward in 2 Chronicles 17:7, but that is historically improbable.<sup>1</sup> The name was common in the canonical period with about a dozen individuals having that name (1 Kings 18:3-16; 1 Chron. 3:21; 7:3; 8:38; 9:16; 12:9; 27:19; 2 Chron. 17:7; 34:12.) We know nothing about him other than his name.

### The Date

It is very difficult to know when Obadiah was written because there is nothing in the heading or introduction of the book to pinpoint the date. Therefore, we must look in the text of the book for historical clues that point to the date. The two dates suggested are 845 B.C. and 586 B.C.<sup>2</sup>

#### **Arguments (and Answers) for a Late Date (586 B.C.)**

The vividness of the events described in verses 11-14 fit most naturally into the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. (The argument assumes what it is trying to prove.)

It is known that Edom was hostile to Judah at this time (Ps. 137:7; Lam. 4:20-21; Ezek 25:12-14) (But Edom was also hostile against Judah at other times in their history.)

Obadiah is closely related to Jeremiah 49:7-16 which was written at the time of Judah's fall to Babylon, and Obadiah could have borrowed from Jeremiah. (A literary relationship does not prove a chronological relationship; Jeremiah could have borrowed from Obadiah.)

The reference in verse 19 to possessing Ephraim and Samaria suits a late date better than an early date when Israel was in existence. (It seems more logical to use the words when the northern kingdom and its capital were still in existence. Samaria became the capital of Israel about 880 B.C. | 1 Kings 16:23-241 and was destroyed in 722 B.C. | 2 Kings 17:5-61.)

The reference to the "exiles" of . . . the sons of Israel' and the "exiles" of Jerusalem (v. 20) proves that both the Assyrian captivity and the Babylonian captivity had already taken place. (The word "exiles" does not demand national deportation. It can refer to individuals who were deported.)

The only attack on Jerusalem in which it is recorded that Edom participated is that of 586 B.C. (Ps. 137:7). (The Bible does not state that Edom participated in Jerusalem's destruction in 586 B.C.)

**Arguments (and Answers) for an Early Date (ca. 845 B.C.)**

The events described by Obadiah fit more naturally with the revolt of Edom against Judah and the Philistine and Arabian attack against Judah and Jerusalem in Jehoram's day (2 Kings 8:20-22; 2 Chron. 21:8-17). (The argument assumes what it is trying to prove.)

The commands of verses 12-14 are jussives which never refer to something in the past. Thus the commands would be inappropriate in 586 B.C. if the city were nothing more than a pile of rubble. (The author could be using the jussives for vividness in his presentation of Edom's sin.)

There is some evidence to indicate that Jeremiah borrowed from Obadiah's prophecy. Thus Obadiah was written before Jeremiah 49. (A literary relationship does not prove a chronological relationship; Obadiah could have borrowed from Jeremiah.)

The 'exiles' of verse 20 can be understood in the same sense as Amos 1:9-12 which refers to the exile of captured individuals rather than the deportation of an entire nation. (The word "exiles" does not prove or disprove either theory.)

In 586 B.C. the Jews were deported to Babylon, but Obadiah 20 speaks of a deportation to Zerephath and Sepharad (Sardis). (This is an argument from silence.)

Obadiah's account does not mention the destruction of the Temple, the razing of the city walls, the deportation to Babylon, or the name of Nebuchadnezzar. (This is an argument from silence.)

There is a noticeable absence of Aramaisms which would be more appropriate from literature written in the ninth century B.C. (prior to Assyrian and Babylonian influence) rather than in the sixth century B.C. (This is an argument from silence, plus: [1] dating on the basis of Aramaisms is not always exact, and [2] the book's length does not allow one to argue on the basis of literary style.)

The position of the book in the Old Testament canon argues for an early date. (If position in the canon argues for chronology, why not place Obadiah before Hosea, Joel, and Amos?)

The words "as the Lord has said" in Joel 2:32 strongly suggest that Joel was quoting from Obadiah. Thus Obadiah was written before Joel. (This argument seems valid, but it ultimately depends on when one dates the Book of Joel.)

## **Conclusion**

It is very difficult to be certain about the date for this book, but primary arguments for a late date seem to center around the idea that the evil perpetrated against Israel by Edom was so bad that only the destruction by Babylon in 586 could fit the description adequately. However, just because a later destruction was worse, doesn't mean that earlier conflicts, destruction, etc. weren't bad too.

If Obadiah is writing after a bad incident in Israel's history, and describes it as being really bad, that doesn't mean a later (and even worse) event is in view because it hadn't happened yet.

For example: A couple of years ago, while building a big wooden jungle gym for a neighbor, my brother fell off and broke his hip. The doctors had to go in and put a metal pin in and put him back together. He describes it as the worst thing that ever happened to him. If 10 years from now, he does the something similar and this time, they have to amputate his leg because the bone is shattered, that would definitely be worse. Now, lets say my brother wrote me a letter saying that his fall and the following few weeks were the worst thing he'd ever gone through. Someone reading that undated letter 100 years later, knowing that my brother had taken a bad fall and had his leg amputated, would naturally assume that the fall he was referring to was the one that led to the amputation. Certainly that was worse, but the letter he wrote me was referring to the first one, because the second one hadn't happened yet.

## **Historical Setting**

There is a long history of enmity between Edom and Israel. The sad thing is that the two nations originated out of two brothers—Esau and Jacob. The hostility began in an argument over the birthright, but during the time of Obadiah it centered around trade routes. The kings highway (show on map) ran all the way from Damascus to Egypt. Whoever controlled the highway, controlled the flow of goods and became wealthy.

The book is written at a time when Edom helped an enemy attack Jerusalem and Edom took the opportunity to take over control of part of the Negev. Edom should have been Judah's ally, instead they encouraged the Babylonians. Obadiah is writing to show that God is going to judge Edom for what she has done.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of the book is to announce the destruction of Edom because of her pride and sin against Judah. The prophet also wants to comfort Judah by announcing Edom's destruction and Judah's restoration and deliverance in the Day of the Lord.

## **The Inevitability of Destruction (1:1-9)**

### **The Sumons To The Nations For Destruction (1:1)**

The Lord has sent a messenger among the nations to stir them up to war against Edom. The Lord has spoken, so it is certain. Destruction is coming.

### **The Source of Destruction is God (1:2-4)**

#### **God's perspective (2a,4b)**

God was going to be the source of their destruction. Edom wanted to be a powerful nation. They sought to control the trade routes. But they were never a force to be worried about. They thought they were secure in their stronghold, but God says they will be brought down. We have an inclusio in 2a and 4b. God says he will make them small in 2a and He will bring them down in 4b. This is contrasted with what is in between these statements in vs 3.

#### **Edom's pride (3)**

To work your way into the more lush areas of Edom, you have to enter through narrow rocky terrain at an area called Petra. If you had a million man army, you would have to enter one man at a time. So the Edomites were very secure in their stronghold.

### **The Thoroughness Of The Destruction (1:5-6)**

More thorough than a robber at night (5a) A robber only takes the valuables. God wasn't going to leave anything. More thorough than a grape gatherer during the day (5b) When you do harvesting by hand, there are always a few berries or grapes left. But not when God is through with you. There won't be anything left.

### **The Means of Destruction: Edom's Allies (1:7)**

The Nabateans were caravan drivers whom the Edomites trusted and traded with. They were their business partners. They were allowed into the city, but they turned against the Edomites and conquered them.

### **The Objects of Destruction (1:8-9)**

God would destroy the wise men and the mighty men in Edom. During the coup, the leaders were killed first and eventually everyone else was slaughtered or deported.

### **The Reason for Destruction (1:10-14)**

#### **The Underlying Sin: Violence to His Brother— Judah (1:10)**

These two nations began with Jacob and Esau. They should have been allies whenever foreign nations attacked one or the other, but we will see Edom's response was when Judah was attacked. What Edom is being judged for is failure to obey one of the underlying principles of the law. The summary of the law was to love God and

to love your neighbor. Even though Edom was not under the law of Moses, they still were responsible before God because their conscience should have told them they were violating the law of love.

### **The Specific Actions: (1:11-14)**

Now Obadiah explains how they failed to show love for their neighbors.

#### **Indifference to Judah's troubles (11)**

When Judah was being attacked by Gentiles, Edom should have come to help his brother, but he stood aloof. He condoned the evil that was taking place.

I think this shows us an interesting principle: It is common in our day to not want to get involved and there are many stories about people standing around, watching a crime be committed and not doing anything about it. This is not an amoral action, it is immoral. James says, "The one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it is sinning" (James 4:17).

#### **Rejoicing over Judah's troubles (12)**

They had an attitude such as, "better them than us." This is also part of the condoning of sin, but it shows a progression towards a more advanced stage of evil. They aren't just indifferent, they are glad that it is happening to Israel.

#### **Looting Judah's possessions (13)**

This is like people who loot a city after a hurricane or something. If you can have degrees of evil, this is one of the lowest forms of theft. It is taking advantage of another's calamity.

#### **Oppressing Judah's people (14)**

When the Israelites fled from their enemies and headed to the south, Edom was there to capture the fugitives and then they sold the survivors as slaves.

Show Progression of evil transparency

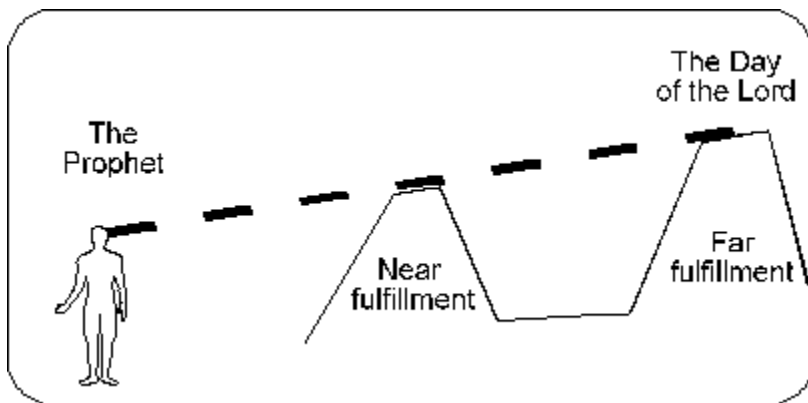
### **The Day of the Lord (1:15-21)**

What is the Day of the Lord? It is the time when God will judge the enemies of Judah. When is it? Before we answer this question we need to understand what the prophets often had in mind as they spoke or wrote their visions.

The Day of the Lord occurs at the 2nd coming of Christ when He comes in judgment on the nations for their rebellion against God and mistreatment of God's people. It is a little confusing as you read the prophets to determine which part of their prophecy is going to be fulfilled in the near future and which will be fulfilled during the

tribulation or the millennium.

Perhaps the following drawing will show what the prophet saw and how the events are often separated in time. This concept was first set forth by Chrysostom in the 4th Century.



Perhaps this is what is happening in our next few verses because in one sentence Obadiah is talking about Edom and the next he is talking about all the nations. The references to Edom's destruction would be the near fulfillment and the references to all the nations would be the far fulfillment.

1:15 begins by saying that the Day of the Lord draws near on all the nations (far fulfillment). Then it focuses on Edom with a singular "you" (near fulfillment). Just as Edom had cut off Jerusalem, so they would be cut off.

1:16f changes to plural "you" which leads me to believe this is really referring to the ultimate Day of the Lord when all the nations will drink the cup of God's wrath. Just like drinking too much makes you reel and stagger so does the wounded and dying soldier stagger around before he falls. Notice that they will "drink continually." They will drink and drink ... They are really going to be staggering.

In 1:17 we see that Israel will be delivered and restored. (This is the promise of future deliverance section we talked about in the introduction to the prophets.)

1:18-21 returns back to the nearer fulfillment concerning Edom and we see that they will be completely destroyed with no survivors. This is poetic or ironic justice on Edom who tried to destroy the survivors of Jerusalem in verse 14. This has already come to pass. The Nabatians kicked them out of their city. The Hasmonians forced them to convert to Judaism and there is no one left today identified as an Edomite. There are no survivors. This is in contrast to Edom who tried to destroy the survivors of Jerusalem in verse 14.

## Conclusion and Application

We discussed in the introduction to the prophets the major categories of the prophetic message. You can see in Obadiah most of them:

- Promise of Judgment
- Reasons for Judgment

- Description of Judgment
- Future Deliverance or Restoration

About the only thing missing is the call for repentance.

What are some personal applications we can make?

(1) **Pride deceives and leads to more sin.**

(2) **Sin follows a downward path.** We saw how Edom progressed in his sins against Judah. At first it was just complacency, but then it was the promotion of evil and finally participation in the evil. It shows us how dangerous complacency is. It doesn't stop there.

Are we complacent about anything? Do you remember the first time you heard about Doctor Death? Were you outraged? Now that he has killed over a dozen people, are you desensitized to the news? Does it affect you as much as it did the first time? What about Abortion, violence on TV, etc. I know from personal experience that after being in the Air Force for 6 years, I became so accustomed to hearing bad language that it really didn't bother me anymore. Sometimes Lori will ask me if a movie had bad language and unless it was really bad, I won't even be able to tell her.

(3) **God will keep His word.** Obadiah said Edom's judgment would be complete and appropriate. They would get what they deserved. And in fact they did.

(4) **God will punish sin.** We are introduced to the Day of the Lord. He sees what nations are mistreating His people and He will judge them accordingly. It shows us that God is in control. This is really important for us to believe when we face tough times.

(5) **God will protect His own.** God is good and He loves us and will take care of us.

These last two ideas, that God is in control and that God is good are extremely important to living the Christian life. These principles were repeated often in the OT and again in the NT. We will see it in Hosea and Haggai for sure. One place we see it in the NT is Mat 6:19-34. In the sermon on the mount, Jesus warns them that they cannot serve two masters - things and God. The temptation for us is to try to find life in things, because we don't believe God can or will take care of us. So we buy new cars, houses, clothes, etc. to try to find meaning. Or we try to find identity and meaning through our job or business. Or we try to find meaning in our children. We do all these things because we don't believe that God is in control and we don't believe God is good.

But Jesus tells them that God is even in control of the birds and the flowers, so he certainly can take care of us. He also emphasizes that God is our Heavenly Father, which means He loves us. And God is good (notice how he is contrasted with the evil human fathers in 7:11).

So, when we face difficulties, that doesn't mean God is not there or that He doesn't love us. The difficulties are for our own character and spiritual development. We can get through them if we believe in God's sovereignty and goodness.

Prophecy is not just gee whiz information for our heads so we can know what God did and will do in the future. Prophecy is good for my heart because it helps me see that God is in control and God is going to preserve His people.

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1 Ebenezer Henderson, *The Twelve Minor Prophets*, Thornapple Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), p. 186.

2 The following are the arguments taken directly from class notes by Dr. Charles H. Dyer.

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