

THE BOOK OF OBADIAH

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INTRODUCTION

Edom is to be destroyed by the hand of God, for the reasons mentioned in this writing. God wouldn't and couldn't overlook the treatment of His people by their hands.

When their 'brothers' were facing their darkest hour, they stood by and cheered and even helped their enemies. Shameless conduct in the sight of God demanded a stiff punishment.

OBADIAH

Of the thirteen men known as Obadiah in the Old Testament, we can't really identify any as the Obadiah of this book. All we know about him is found in this book.

One Jewish tradition identifies him as the one who was Ahab's steward who hid one hundred prophets from Jezebel, who was Ahab's wife, **1 Kings 18:3-4**. He is possibly the same person mentioned above who feared the Lord from his youth, **1 Kings 18:12**.

He may have also been the Obadiah sent by Jehoshaphat to teach the law in Judah, **2 Chronicles 17:7**. He may have been the Obadiah who was one of the overseers in repairing the temple under Josiah, **2 Chronicles 34:12**.

Whoever he was, we know that His name, Obadiah, means 'servant of the Lord' and from the nature of the book, we would conclude that he was patriotic to his people, and thus he had great concerns toward Edom for what they had historically done toward the Israelites in their times of calamity.

DATE

Most people seem to be divided on the date of this writing; some consider it to date around 845 B.C. during the reign of Jehoram. Evidence for this date is found in Jeremiah, **Jeremiah 49:7-13**.

It seems Jeremiah is quoting Obadiah, in regard to the destruction of Edom. Jeremiah wrote his prophecy about 200 years after Obadiah. And so, he could well be quoting from a previous prophet regarding a similar enemy.

Also, by the time of Nebuchadnezzar's (King of Babylon) destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., the Edomites and Babylon were not on friendly terms either. To cheer their enemy on, knowing they were on the list of destruction as well by Babylon, just doesn't seem right.

However, there is evidence for the later date as well, 586 B.C. In **Obadiah 1:1**, he uses the term 'we,' we have heard a rumour from the Lord, we, meaning myself, Obadiah, and the other prophets, meaning Jeremiah, and even Ezekiel. All three of these prophets mention the destruction of Edom in their prophecies, **Ezekiel 35:1-10**.

Mount Seir is a reference to Edom. Ezekiel prophesied from 593 B.C. to 571 B.C. during the time of Jeremiah as well. So did God give these three prophets the same message at the same time?

Or did he give it to **Obadiah 200** years earlier, and they just copied it from his declaration? Who is the 'we' that Obadiah is referring to? Questions remain, but either date will not hinder the message of this book.

EDOM

The Edomites were direct descendants of Esau, Jacob's twin brother. The animosity between these two brothers was constant and lasting, **Genesis 25:21-26 / Genesis 25:27-34 / Genesis 27:1-45**. Only for a short period of time had this relationship been considered 'civil', **Genesis 33:1-20**.

This animosity between them carried over to their descendants as well. When the descendants of Jacob, now known as the children of Israel, were travelling to their promised land, free from the bondage of Egypt, they came to the borders of Edom, **Numbers 20:14-21**.

Seeking permission to pass through their land, Edom refused them such passage and forced them to go around. The land of Edom and the surrounding regions were very treacherous. High mountains and deep valleys were not very friendly to sojourners travelling amongst them.

But Edom had a passageway through all of this that would make the journey much easier on the children of Israel. But access to this route was forbidden, and they were forced to travel a much more difficult way.

From this day on, their relationship with one another would be hostile. Edom had become Israel's enemy. Many of the kings of Judah fought battles against the Edomites. King Saul, **1 Samuel 14:47**. King David, **2 Samuel 8:13-14**. King Solomon, **1 Kings 11:14**. King Amaziah, **2 Kings 14:7**.

When Judah and its capital city, Jerusalem, were being destroyed, Edom sat by and 'cheered.' **Psalms 137:7**. For their actions at this time, God was now pronouncing His judgment upon them.

God remembered their wicked treatment of His children at the hands not only of the suppressing army but also of the Edomites nearby. This is why the Book of Obadiah was written.

The irony of the confrontation between the Edomites and the Israelites was in the appointment of Herod in 30 B.C. by Octavian, Caesar of Rome, to be the king over the Judean territories. Herod was a descendant of the Edomites.

OUTLINE

Introduction. Obadiah 1-4
Judgment on Edom. Obadiah 5-9
Edom's Sins against Judah. Obadiah 10-14
The Day of the Lord. Obadiah 15-18
The Restoration and Expansion of Israel. Obadiah 19-21

THE TEXT

'The vision of Obadiah. This is what the Sovereign LORD says about Edom—We have heard a message from the LORD: An envoy was sent to the nations to say, 'Rise, let us go against her for battle'— 'See, I will make you small among the nations; you will be utterly despised.' Obadiah 1-2

OBADIAH'S VISION

A message comes to Obadiah, whose name means ‘servant of God’, in the form of a vision, **Hebrews 1:1-2**, to deliver against the nation of Edom. Who is the ‘we’ that Obadiah is referring to?

Was it Obadiah, Jeremiah or Ezekiel, or both? Did God give these three prophets the same message at the same time? Or did he give it to Obadiah two hundred years earlier, and they just copied it from his declaration? The Lord is stirring the nations for the battle to fight against Edom, **Jeremiah 49:14**.

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following.

‘If they be great and prosperous, it is by God’s providence; if they be low and depressed, it is by his justice. Compared with the Assyrians, Chaldeans, Egyptians, Syrians, Arabs, and other neighbouring nations, the Idumeans were a small people.’

The message from God is that God is going to cut down the nation of Edom to size. God will destroy and dishonour them. Why is God doing this? Why is God moving the nations to act against Edom? Why does Edom need to be cut down to size?

‘The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rocks and make your home on the heights, you who say to yourself, ‘Who can bring me down to the ground?’ Though you soar like the eagle and make your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down,’ declares the LORD. ‘If thieves came to you, if robbers in the night—oh, what a disaster awaits you! —would they not steal only as much as they wanted? If grape pickers came to you, would they not leave a few grapes? But how Esau will be ransacked, his hidden treasures pillaged! All your allies will force you to the border; your friends will deceive and overpower you; those who eat your bread will set a trap for you, but you will not detect it. ‘In that day,’ declares the LORD, ‘will I not destroy the wise men of Edom, those of understanding in the mountains of Esau? Your warriors, Teman, will be terrified, and everyone in Esau’s mountains will be cut down in the slaughter.’ Obadiah 3-9

The Edomites were full of themselves, ‘the pride of your heart has deceived you,’ God says, **Obadiah 3**. The message of the prophecy from Obadiah is the problems and perils of pride. Listen to the pride that they have in their heart in **Obadiah 3**. Edom thinks that there is no nation that can defeat them. No nation can rise against them.

Where did this pride come from? A few pictures of some of the fortified cities of Edom will reveal as **Obadiah 3** declares that their cities sat high on the rocks. Some of the cities in Edom sat at five thousand five hundred feet in elevation. Because of this, they thought they couldn’t fall or be defeated.

Armerding, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Edom’s natural defences were imposing. Its main centres of civilisation were situated in a narrow ridge of mountainous land southeast of the Dead Sea. This ridge exceeded a height of 4,000 feet throughout its northern sector, and it rose in places to 5,700 feet in the south. Its height was rendered more inaccessible by the gorges radiating from it toward the Arabah on the west and the desert eastwards. ‘In addition to these natural fortifications, Edom was strongly defended by a series of Iron Age fortresses, particularly on the eastern frontier where the land descended more gradually to the desert.’

But Edom forgot to consider something; they forgot that the One who rides in the clouds of heaven can bring them down, **Psalms 104:3**. They looked around the earth and believed that they were amazing and powerful, **Obadiah 3**. They believed that they were in control. They believed they controlled their own destiny, but they forgot about God, **Obadiah 4 / Jeremiah 49:16**. This is really the foundation of pride, forgetting God. Pride comes from believing that we don’t need God.

We think we can depend on ourselves, we have our own strength, we have our own wealth, we have our own abilities, we don’t need God, we’re self-sufficient. The sad thing is that pride is glorified in our culture. To be independent and self-assured, even to the point of harming others, is glorified.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following concerning **Obadiah 5-6**.

‘Thieves robbed houses and grape harvesters stripped vineyards, yet both left a little behind that they did not carry off. However, Yahweh’s destruction of Edom would be so complete that nothing at all would remain of her, **Jeremiah 49:9-10**. There would be no remnant of Edom left (in contrast to the remnant that Yahweh promised elsewhere to leave in Israel). The form of this assurance sounds like mourning in the presence of death. Concealed treasures of all kinds, human as well as material, would not escape Yahweh’s omniscient eye, **Jeremiah 49:4**.’

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The plundering and searching out of Edom’s treasures would occur because Petra was a great emporium of the Syrio-Arabian trade, where many valuables were stored, and because, with the loss of those riches, the prosperity and power of Edom would be destroyed.’

Notice that the things the people of Edom took pride in are the same things we take pride in as individuals, as a culture, and as a country. In **Obadiah 8**, they took pride in their ‘wisdom’.

Teman, a city in Edom, was known as the centre for wisdom, **Jeremiah 49:7**. We do the same thing; we think we are so educated, we think we are so advanced, we think we are so knowledgeable and are so evolved from our predecessors.

We just think we know so much more, and those before us were either Neanderthals or buffoons. Therefore, because we are so smart, we’re going to succeed where others failed!

In **Obadiah 7**, and **Obadiah 9**, we see that the people of Edom took pride in their ‘military might and their allies’, **Deuteronomy 2:5**. But God declares that the mighty men of Teman, **Habakkuk 3:3**, will be dismayed in **Obadiah 9 / Amos 1:12**.

They think that their might will save them from any attack. Nations today think that they will continue to stand because of their military success and might. The problem with pride is that we forget God. A nation isn’t strong because of its military might.

Israel didn’t need fortified cities because God was going to defeat their enemies. When Israel turned from the Lord and built strong cities, those fortified cities were destroyed because no one calculated that God would judge pride.

Our wisdom will not save us from the judgment of the Lord. Our education and knowledge will not save us from judgment. Our strength and might will not save us from judgment.

God repeatedly gave warnings against pride that would come from forgetting Him. Listen to what God told Israel before they entered the land of Canaan that God was to give them, **Deuteronomy 8:11–20**.

Our pride means we’ve forgotten God, we think that our success is by our might and forgot that it’s because God gave it to us. We forget our wealth is from the hand of the Lord, and God says He will judge people for doing this. This is certainly true when it comes to the nation of Edom, **Obadiah 1-4**, which is a quotation from **Jeremiah 49:14-16**.

God had already prophesied against Edom about their pride, and now their judgment was coming, but they didn’t listen to the warning and didn’t repent. Therefore, God’s judgment will leave nothing, **Obadiah 5**. The nation of Edom will be stripped bare, and the destruction will be complete.

‘Because of the violence against your brother Jacob, you will be covered with shame; you will be destroyed forever. On the day, you stood aloof while strangers carried off his wealth and foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem, you were like one of them. You should not gloat over your brother in the day of his misfortune, nor rejoice over the people of Judah in the day of their destruction, nor boast so much in the day of their trouble. You should not march through the gates of my people in the day of their disaster, nor gloat over them in their calamity in the day of their disaster, nor seize their wealth in the day of their disaster. You should not wait at the crossroads to cut down their fugitives, nor hand over their survivors in the day of their trouble.’ **Obadiah 10-14**

Not only is Edom judged for its attitude of pride, but God also describes that their pride led to their sinful actions. Pride was the basis for their sins. In **Obadiah 10**, we read that Edom committed violence against Israel. When God allowed the Babylonians to invade Jerusalem three times, people were trying to escape the invasion. But rather than helping Israel when it was invaded, they would kill those who were fleeing, **Psalms 137:7**. Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Pride was not the only reason God would humble Edom. The Edomites had also cursed the people whom God had purposed to bless, the Israelites, **Genesis 27:40-41 / Exodus 15:15 / Numbers 20:14-21 / Deuteronomy 2:4 / Judges 11:17-18 / 1 Samuel 14:47-48 / 2 Samuel 8:13-14 / 1 Kings 11:15-16 / 1 Chronicles 18:11-13 / Psalms 60**. In doing this, they had incurred God’s wrath, **Genesis 12:3**.’

Their pride had taken away their compassion for other people, **Luke 10:31-32**. By elevating ourselves, we no longer care about other people; we will hurt others because pride tells us that we are the only ones who are important. We wonder in our society today why people break laws and hurt others, we wonder why violence is increasing, and we wonder why things have moved the way that they have.

The answer is pride, which comes from forgetting God. When we forget God, then we think we are important, and when we think we are important, then others must suffer. This is how violence and genocide occur.

Further, in **Obadiah 11**, we see that Edom offered no help when the Babylonians came into Jerusalem to destroy the nation and city. Edom took a point of view that said that it didn’t affect them, so they didn’t care. This is shameful, and yet it happens because of pride.

Think about how often this has occurred in the history of the world. We can look back to the genocide of the Jews under Hitler, we see Hitler invading nations, and no one would do anything. Why not? Because, in our pride, people said that it didn’t affect them.

Pride causes us to lose our compassion so that we no longer care for people. We no longer care that people are getting killed in other places in the world; we just care that it’s not here.

This is an evil to the Lord, and Edom was judged for this attitude. We must care when the innocent suffer. Are other people around the world less valuable to God because they aren’t British? Yet sometimes this is the attitude we see, and people don’t care, and a nation does nothing because we only care about ourselves.

Not only did Edom not act, but they rejoiced in watching Judah’s misfortune and ruin, **Obadiah 12-13**. When the disaster happened, notice that the people of Edom were taking this as an opportunity to loot the wealth. Pride causes us to take from others, even those who are experiencing misfortune.

We aren’t owed anything; it doesn’t matter if we are being mistreated, we don’t have the right to take from other people. Pride causes us to show no regard for the property and well-being of others. So, Edom is condemned for participating in the calamity, **Obadiah 14**.

Thompson, in his commentary, says the following concerning **Obadiah 14**.

‘The reference is almost certainly to the catastrophe of 586 B.C. This is the only capture of Jerusalem in which it is recorded that the Edomites had a part, **Psalms 137:7 / 1 Esdras 4:45**.’

‘The day of the LORD is near for all nations. As you have done, it will be done to you; your deeds will return upon your own head. Just as you drank on my holy hill, so all the nations will drink continually; they will drink and drink and be as if they had never been. But on Mount Zion will be deliverance; it will be holy, and Jacob will possess his inheritance. Jacob will be a fire and Joseph a flame; Esau will be stubble, and they will set him on fire and destroy him. There will be no survivors from Esau.’ The LORD has spoken. People from the Negev will occupy the mountains of Esau, and people from the foothills will possess the land of the Philistines. They will occupy the fields of Ephraim and Samaria, and Benjamin will possess Gilead. This company of Israelite exiles who are in Canaan will possess the land as far as Zarephath; the exiles from Jerusalem who are in Sepharad will possess the towns of the

Negev. Deliverers will go up on Mount Zion to govern the mountains of Esau. And the kingdom will be the LORD's.' Obadiah 15-21

The final verses of this prophecy record a vision of the future concerning what God will do. Notice something interesting in **Obadiah 15**. The judgment of the day of the Lord isn't spoken against Edom. The day of the Lord is near for all the nations.

Remember that this prophecy opened with God rousing the nations to attack Edom, **Obadiah 1**. But now the prophecy moves forward in its declaration. The day of the Lord will come upon all the nations, and all people are going to stand under judgment. Edom now represents all the peoples and nations that stand against the Lord.

Notice the measure of God's judgment in **Obadiah 15**. To say this scriptural principle another way, that which you sow you will also reap, **Leviticus 24:20 / Deuteronomy 19:21 / Galatians 6:7-9**. What you have done to others is what God is going to do to you.

Rejecting the Lord means that there will not be grace toward us, but a repayment for what we have done to others. This should be a terrifying thought to us; what we have done to others is what God will do to us.

Obadiah 16 pushes this idea even further; the nations are going to drink and swallow what God is pouring out. God frequently uses this idea of drinking the wine of his wrath as an image of judgment, **Isaiah 51:17 / Jeremiah 25:16 / Jeremiah 25:28 / Habakkuk 2:16**.

God repays, and his wrath will bring about a full judgment that no one will be able to stand against. God ends the Book of Revelation with the same note, **Revelation 22:12**. Knowing that God will repay us according to our deeds, we should feel the doom that is coming upon every person because of what we have done.

We have failed, we are full of pride, we have lacked compassion, and we have acted in ways that show we don't trust in the Lord, but there is an offer of salvation in **Obadiah 17**.

There is a means of escape and deliverance. Zion is the place of escape, Zion is the place of rescue and safety. Hope is in the Lord, and those who turn to Zion will not be repaid for their sins. God's people are pictured as the victors.

Thompson, in his commentary, says the following concerning **Obadiah 17**.

'According to Obadiah, Mount Zion shall be 'holy', **Obadiah 1:17**, reserved for those who have escaped condemnation in the judgment; the new Jerusalem of Revelation is a morally holy city for those whose names are found in the Book of Life and who are victorious over sin, **Revelation 21:7 / Revelation 21:27**. Obadiah's closing words, 'The kingdom shall be the Lord's,' are given a higher meaning in the triumphal chorus: 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ', **Revelation 11:15**.'

Notice that 'Jacob will be a fire' and 'Esau will be stubble,' **Obadiah 1:18**.

Jamieson-Fausset-Brown, in their commentary, says the following.

'Joseph, that is, the two kingdoms, Judah and Ephraim or Israel. The two shall form one kingdom, their former feuds being laid aside, **Isaiah 11:12 / Isaiah 13 / Isaiah 37:22-28 / Jeremiah 3:18 / Hosea 1:11**. The Jews returned with some of the Israelites from Babylon; and, under John Hyrcanus, so subdued and, compelling them to be circumcised, incorporated the Idumeans with themselves that they formed part of the nation (Josephus, Antiquities, 13.17; 12.11). This was but an earnest of the future union of Israel and Judah in the possession of the enlarged land as one kingdom, **Ezekiel 37:16 / Malachi 4:1**.'

In **Obadiah 19-20**, God's people are pictured as being restored to God's promised land in God's kingdom, **Luke 4:18**. Josephus, in his antiquities, says the following.

'Alexander the Great gave Samaria to the Jews; and John Hyrcanus subdued the same country after his wars with the Syrians.'

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following concerning Zarephath.

‘Sarepta, a city of the Sidonians, **1 Kings 17:9**. That is, they should possess the whole city of Phoenicia, called here that of the Canaanites.’

Lightfoot, in his commentary, says the following concerning Sepharad.

‘Sepharad was a part of Edom. Those who were captives among the Canaanites should possess the country of the Canaanites; and those whom the Edomites had enslaved should possess the cities of their masters.’

In **Obadiah 21**, God’s people are pictured as deliverers who will rule over the enemies of God, and the kingdom will belong to the Lord.

Poole, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Deliverers; literally, the governors or leaders of those captive troops, who shall come up from Babylon to their own country, such as Zerubbabel, Ezra, Nehemiah, of whom it was said he came to seek the good of the Jews, **Nehemiah 2:10**, and successively after these many others, to the times of Hyrcanus and the Maccabees; mystically, Christ and his apostles, and other preachers of the gospel.’

The kingdom is restored, Obadiah pictures the humble will be exalted, and the proud will be humiliated, **Luke 14:11**. Here is the biggest problem with pride: God will repay us for our deeds. Pride causes our sinful behaviours, which God will repay us for doing.

Further, the proud will not have hope in God’s future judgments but fear. This makes sense because Obadiah has taught us that pride comes from forgetting God. We have forgotten the Lord our God and therefore are deserving of judgment.

CONCLUSION

If we’re not careful, pride leads to arrogance and a sense of independence from God, **Proverbs 16:18**. Just as Edom took pride in their geographical location, allies, wisdom and might, such arrogance God will punish, **Isaiah 13:9-11**. We need to be careful that pride doesn’t lead us to mistreat our brothers and sisters in Christ; this is what Edom was guilty of, **Obadiah 10**. How we treat our brothers and sisters in Christ affects our relationship with the Lord, **1 Corinthians 8:12**.

We also need to be careful that our pride doesn’t cause us to rejoice when our enemies fall, **Proverbs 24:17-18**. This again was what Edom did when Judah was plundered, **Obadiah 12**. This sort of gloating is displeasing to God! And finally, in the time of divine judgment, God provides a means and place of escape for those who turn to Him. Note again **Obadiah 17**, where Mount Zion would become a place of deliverance. Today, spiritual Mount Zion is a place to which we can turn, **Hebrews 12:22-24**. This is what we come to as we obey the Gospel of Christ! Preventing pride is as simple as being thankful to God and honouring God for all things in all circumstances. This is one reason why the scriptures repeatedly tell us to always be thankful and pray without ceasing.

This is how we can defend ourselves against pride. Who we are is because of God, what we have is because of God, and where we are is because of God. Everything is in the hands of God. Be thankful to God today for what you have.

As the writer of Ecclesiastes reminds his readers, in **Ecclesiastes 1:1-11**, we aren’t guaranteed what tomorrow will bring, so enjoy what you have from the hand of God today. Honour God every day.