

### Introduction

#### Background

**Name & Author:** The book is named after the prophet and author of the book, Obadiah. We know nothing of the prophet Obadiah. In fact the Old Testament mentions at least 12 men named Obadiah stretching from the time of David to the post-exile period.

**Date:** There is considerable debate as to the date of these prophecies. Furthermore, the writer does not give us an exact date. That leaves us with internal evidence only. The key evidence of this sort comes in verses 10-14. From these verses it appears these prophecies were given after Edom had attacked Israel or Judah and in a time when Israel or Judah had been invaded and its inhabitants carried captive.

There are three historical times when these events occurred. There are compelling arguments for each of these dates:

- During the Reign of Jehoram (2 Kings 8:20-22 & 2 Chronicles 21:8-10, 16-17)
- During the Reign of Ahaz (2 Chronicles 28:16-21)
- The Babylonian Captivity (Psalm 137:7)

The most compelling argument is not the historical events, however, as much as the similar themes and quotations between Obadiah and Jeremiah, giving credence to the thought that they were contemporaries. The similarity between Obadiah 1b-4 and Jeremiah 49:14-16 is remarkable:

*(Obadiah 1:1-4 NASB) " We have heard a report from the LORD, And an envoy has been sent among the nations saying, "Arise and let us go against her for battle"--*

[2] *"Behold, I will make you small among the nations; You are greatly despised.*

[3] *"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?'*

[4] *"Though you build high like the eagle, Though you set your nest among the stars, From there I will bring you down," declares the LORD."*

*(Jeremiah 49:14-16 NASB) "I have heard a message from the LORD, And an envoy is sent among the nations, saying, "Gather yourselves together and come against her, And rise up for battle!"*

[15] *"For behold, I have made you small among the nations, Despised among men.*

[16] *"As for the terror of you, The arrogance of your heart has deceived you, O you who live in the clefts of the rock, Who occupy the height of the hill.*

*Though you make your nest as high as an eagle's, I will bring you down from there," declares the LORD."*

The question is who is quoting whom? If Obadiah is quoting Jeremiah that would put the date of Obadiah after the exile, giving credence to the third date. The other would give credence to the first two dates. According to research conducted by John D.W. Watts, "...the two texts must have a single source. Differences are of the kind that come in transmission rather than original composition. T.H. Robinson's judgment that the material is more original in Obadiah, but better preserved in Jeremiah, can hardly be improved upon. This presumes that both drew on a common source that was older than either."<sup>1</sup>

**Audience:** The Edomites are the descendants of Esau. Esau and his younger twin brother, Jacob, battled with each other from the time of their birth onward. Likewise their descendants, the Edomites and the Israelites have battled with each other throughout history. Moses, Saul, David, Joab, Solomon, Jehoshaphat, Jehoram, and Amaziah all battled against the Edomites.

Except for brief rebellions under Jehoram, Edom was a vassal under Judah's control from the time of Solomon until the Assyrians conquered the nation and made them their own vassal.

## Purpose

The prophecies of Amos are a warning to the people of Israel that their corrupt religion and disregard for the poor would result in the destruction of the nation. It is a call for Israel to repent or face judgment.

## Theme

Although Obadiah is the shortest book in the Old Testament with only 21 verses, the prophecy against Edom encompasses many of the themes found throughout the prophetic books<sup>2</sup>:

- Pride, arrogance, and the God's humiliation of the proud (vs. 3-4, 8-9)
- Judgment on unbelieving Gentiles who oppress Israel (v. 10)
- Oppression of the afflicted (v. 13)
- The day of the LORD (v. 15)
- Deliverance and Restoration of Israel (v. 17-21)

# The Message of Obadiah

## The Sin of Edom

Edom was arrogant and gloating in the woes of Judah. The message of God to the Edomites is simple. You should have helped your brother nation against his oppressors, for your destruction is next. Edom was stood aloof while foreigners entered Jerusalem, they gloated at Judah's misfortune. Edom looted Judah and cut down survivors rather than give them sanctuary.

## Restoration for Judah

We have already seen how the prophecies against the other nations found in Amos were not really so much for the benefit of those nations as much as they were for Judah and/or Israel. So it seems to be for Obadiah's prophecy against Edom. First, there is no call for repentance to the

<sup>1</sup> John D. W. Watts. *Obadiah: A Critical Exegetical Commentary*. (Grand Rapids:Eerdmans, 1969), 33.

<sup>2</sup> Walter L. Baker, "Obadiah." *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*. John F. Walvoord & Roy B. Zuck, ed., (Victor Books, 1985), 1453.

Edomites. The purpose of proclaiming coming judgment is never just an exercise in foretelling. God uses prophecy to bring people to repentance, or, as is likely in Obadiah's case, to encourage the Jews that God had not abandoned them. Restoration was coming, and the nations which are now gloating over your demise will disappear from the earth.

*Then the house of Jacob will be a fire  
And the house of Joseph a flame;  
But the house of Esau will be as stubble  
And they will set them on fire and consume them,  
So that there will be no survivor of the house of Esau,"  
For the LORD has spoken...  
<sup>21</sup>The deliverers will ascend Mount Zion  
To judge the mountain of Esau,  
And the kingdom will be the LORD'S.*

Edom was condemned for not helping their perceived enemy, Judah, during their time of need. Just as Jonah faced God's rebuke for not helping his enemy during its time of need. How often do I gloat over the misfortunes of my enemies, and not help them or have mercy on them. Jesus taught us,

## Bibliography

Baker, Walter L. "Obadiah", *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, John F. Walvoord & Roy B. Zuck, ed., Victor Books, 1985.

Watts, John D. W. *Obadiah: A Critical Exegetical Commentary*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1969.