

Profit from

The Minor Prophets

2: Obadiah

Apart from what we read in his book, we know nothing about Obadiah. We cannot even be sure that the writer was called Obadiah. The word 'obadiah' means 'the servant (or worshipper) of Jehovah' — it could be a reference to his ministry, not his name. That said, 'Obadiah' was a common Israelite name — there are twelve others in the Old Testament. There is an unfounded tradition that says the prophet Obadiah was King Ahab's steward (1Kings 18: 3 – 16) but really, we have no idea about his background, his family, where he lived or what he did.

Date

It is just as difficult to be sure exactly when the book was written. The strongest clue we have is that the book mentions the sacking of Jerusalem. However, the city was sacked four times so that hardly gives us much help. Some think the book was written very early, in the mid-ninth century BC, following raids by the Philistines and Arabian tribes during the reign of Jehoram. This would make it the earliest of the prophetic books. But it is more likely that Obadiah's prophecy points towards the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians in 586BC, (2 Kings 25). We will assume that Obadiah has 586BC in mind.

Outline

God's Message Against Edom (1:1 – 14)

Edom's sentence pronounced (1:1 – 9)

God's charges against Edom (1:10 – 14)

The Day of the Lord (1:15 – 21)

Universal judgment (1:15 – 16)

Jerusalem will be delivered (1:17 – 18)

God's Kingdom will be established (1:19 – 21)

A Vision Concerning Edom

"Thus says the Lord God concerning Edom."

Obadiah 1:1

The book of Obadiah is a message from God concerning Edom. The land of Edom, Israel's nearest neighbour to the south-east, was also known as Hor and Seir. It occupied a high plateau that rises to over 5,000 feet above sea level in what is modern-day Jordan. The Edomites, dwelling among the rocks, thought they were secure from enemy attack.

Although Israel and Edom shared a common ancestry, animosity between them went back more than eight hundred years to the days of Isaac.

"Isaac pleaded with the Lord for his wife, because she was barren; and the Lord granted his plea, and Rebekah his wife conceived. But the children struggled together within her; and she said, "If all is well, why am I like this?" So she went to inquire of the Lord. And the Lord said to her: "Two nations are in your womb, Two peoples shall be separated from your body; One people shall be stronger than the other, And the older shall serve the younger.""

Genesis 25:21 – 26

The twins who struggled in her womb were Jacob and Esau; Esau was the father of the Edomites. The Edomite nation surfaces for the first time in Numbers 20:14 – 21 where we read of their refusal to allow Israel, travelling from Egypt to the Promised Land, to pass through their territory.

Four hundred years later Saul had to go to war with Edom (1 Samuel 14:47). David conquered and annexed it (2 Samuel 8:14) but Solomon faced an Edomite rebellion (1 Kings 11:14ff.) as did Jehoram a century on (2 Kings 8:20), and Amaziah fifty years later still (2 Kings 14:7). Edom joined with the Moabites and Ammonites to attack Judah in the days of Jehosaphat and was defeated but on another occasion, in the reign of Ahaz, Edom defeated Judah and carried away captives (2 Chronicles 20:1 – 2 and 28:17).

When The Babylonians, under Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem in 586BC, Edom stood back, rejoiced, joined in the looting and handed survivors who tried to escape through their territory back to the Babylonians (verses 11 – 14).

After the Exile, Edomites settled in the region of Hebron or Idumea, as it was called by the Romans, for more than four more centuries. At the time of Christ, they were mingling with the Jews and adopting their customs. Herod the Great was an Idumean. It is believed that the Edomites were finally eliminated by the Romans in the same campaign that destroyed Jerusalem in 70AD.

The prophesy of Obadiah is one of a number of pronouncements against Edom. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Amos all prophesied against it. Indeed, verses 1b – 4 and 5 – 6 of Obadiah repeat practically verbatim Jeremiah 49:14 – 16 and 9 – 10. The writer of Psalm 137 and the prophet Malachi also refer to the events foretold by Obadiah.

“Remember, O Lord, against the sons of Edom
The day of Jerusalem,
Who said, “Raze it, raze it,
To its very foundation!”

Psalm 137:7

“I have loved you,” says the Lord. “Yet you say, ‘In what way have You loved us? Was not Esau Jacob’s brother?’” Says the Lord. “Yet Jacob I have loved; But Esau I have hated, And laid waste his mountains and his heritage For the jackals of the wilderness.” Even though Edom has said, “We have been impoverished, But we will return and build the desolate places,” Thus says the Lord of hosts: “They may build, but I will throw down; They shall be called the Territory of Wickedness, And the people against whom the Lord will have indignation forever. Your eyes shall see, And you shall say, ‘The Lord is magnified beyond the border of Israel.’”

Malachi 1:2 – 5

Obadiah's Message

Obadiah's prophesy can be viewed on four levels.

First, taken at face value, there is a message for the rulers and people of Edom. God, through His prophet condemns the pride and cruelty shown in their mistreatment of Judah during the sacking of Jerusalem: they will not go unpunished, their doom is certain (verses 2 – 9). God slams them for their pride: pride in their geography (verse 3), pride in their standing with other nations (verse 7) and pride in their wisdom (verse 8).

Second, there is a message for God's own people. Obadiah addresses the remnant of Israel, assuring them that He will triumph and destroy the wickedness of all the nations and that righteousness will reign in the day of the Lord. It is a common theme in the writings of the prophets: a coming day that will bring the promise of deliverance and restoration for God's people. It calls to mind God's covenant love for His people.

Third, implied throughout Obadiah's prophecy is God's sovereignty over the nations. He is the Sovereign Lord who logs the iniquities of all the peoples (verses 10 – 14), administers justice (verses 4, 8 and 15), and controls the destinies of the nations. Obadiah stands as a warning to the nations that they too will have their deeds returned upon them as the day of God's wrath approaches (verses 15 – 16).

Fourth, Obadiah's prophesy has things to say to the people of God in every age — to us.

Questions

- What single word sums up the sins of Edom?
- What do you understand by the phrase "the day of the Lord" (verse 15)?
- What practical lessons can we learn from the book of Obadiah?