

OBADIAH

WRITER

Of the thirteen men known as Obadiah in the Old Testament, we cannot identify any as the Obadiah of this book. All we know about him is found in this book. The name Obadiah means “servant of the Lord.” From the nature of the book, we would conclude that he was patriotic to his people, and thus he had great consternation toward Edom for what they had historically done toward the Israelites in their times of calamity.

DATE

The book was written at a time when the Israelites were suffering at the hands of the Assyrians. It was a time when Jerusalem had been plundered, and the Edomites seem to have taken part in the plundering (Ob 11). They took delight in the hardships of the people of God, conspiring with the enemies of Israel (Ob 12). At one time when the Israelites were fleeing their aggressors, the Edomites blocked their escape and sold them into the slavery over their conquerors (Ob 14).

Except for the final conquest of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. by the Babylonians, it is difficult to determine the period of national calamity during which Obadiah gave his message. There were four different occasions when Jerusalem and Judea were under attack by foreign invaders. Shishak, king of Egypt, took the city during the reign of Rehoboam in 926 B.C. (1 Kg 14:25,26; 2 Ch 12:1-12). During the reign of Jehoram, the Philistines and Arabians plundered the city in 848-841 B.C. (2 Ch 21:16,17). Jehoash, the king of the northern kingdom, defeated Amaziah, king of Judah, in 790 B.C. (2 Kg 14:8-14; 2 Ch 25:17-24). And finally, Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in 586 B.C. (Jr 52:12-17). Obadiah probably delivered his message during the final conquest of Jerusalem when Israelites fled from Jerusalem and Judea, and subsequently, were captured and sold into slavery by the Edomites. However, some affirm that the date of Obadiah’s prophetic ministry and writing of the book was around 845 B.C. Since Obadiah does not mention the total destruction of Jerusalem, and the final captivity of the southern kingdom, it is assumed that the book was written during one of the invasions of Judah. Since earlier prophets alluded to portions of Obadiah, it is assumed that Obadiah’s ministry would have taken place before the prophetic ministries of both Amos and Jeremiah (Compare Am 1:6 to Ob 6; Am 9:2 with Ob 4; Am 7:12 with Ob 19; Jr 49:7-16 with Ob 1-9). However, the nature of the message indicates that Obadiah was delivering final judgments on Edom for all the antagonism that she had committed

against Israel in the past. Since these final judgments would include all their sins against God's people, we would conclude that the message was delivered after the final fall of Judah in Palestine at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., and contemporary with Jeremiah.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Understanding the historical relationship between Edom and Israel helps us understand the animosity that the Edomites had toward the Israelites. Isaac had twin sons, Jacob and Esau (Gn 25:2-26). When the two boys were grown, by deceit, Jacob obtained Esau's birthright (Gn 25:27-34; 27:1-45). This was the beginning of Esau's resentment toward his brother. It seems that Esau's anger was passed on to his heritage that came from his loins (See Am 1:11; Mt 1:2-5). Esau became the father of the Edomites, and Jacob the father of the Israelites. When Israel came out of Egyptian captivity, they were admonished not to abhor their brethren, the Edomites (Dt 23:7). However, the Edomites refused to allow Israel to pass through their land on their way to the promised land (Nm 20:14-21). Nevertheless, God commanded Israel that they were not to take any of the territories of the Edomites (Dt 2:1-8). God even gave a provision that after three generations, an Edomite could become a part of the assembly of Israel (Dt 23:7,8). However, because of the great animosity that the Edomites harbored toward Israel, they were the continual antagonists of Israel. Therefore, because of their evil behavior toward Israel, God condemned them to termination as a nation (See Is 34:5-7; 63:1-4; Jr 49:17; Ez 25:12-14; 35:1-15).

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 Judean territories. Herod was a descendant of the Edomites.

Outline: (1) Judgment of Edom (1-9), (2) Reasons for judgment (10-14), (3) The day of the Lord (15-21)

JUDGMENT OF EDOM

1-4 Vision: See Is 1:1; Jr 14:14; Ez 7:26; Nh 1:1. **Rumor:** Obadiah may be referring to a proclamation by another prophet of God (See Jr 49:14). **Ambassador:** A messenger had been sent out to the nations to stir up animosity against Edom. Reference here could also be to the general animosity against the

Edomites because of their unfriendly spirit with all other nations. If this was true, then God was working among the nations in order to bring about His judgment on a nation that had worked against His Messianic mission through the nation of Israel. ***I will make you small:*** God's judgment of the Edomites would terminate them as a nation, but preserve a few for the sake of heritage. ***Dwell in the clefts:*** The security of Edom, was because Petra, or Sela, was located in a rock valley. It could be accessed only

through a deep ravine that was about five meters wide, with rock walls on each side that extended upwards about sixty meters. Because of its secure entrance, it was almost impossible for any invading army to conquer the city. The Edomites thus enjoyed a natural protection from all invading enemies. Their impenetrable capital, therefore, led them to be arrogant concerning their existence as a nation. It was from this advantage point that they controlled the trade routes between Africa and the northern countries that passed through Palestine. **Eagle ... stars:** Edom became arrogant because of her strategic location (See Ez 35:13). Nevertheless, God would bring the Edomites down because they had been the enemies of His people.

5-9 Thieves ... grape gatherers: If thieves came through to steal, they would leave something. Even raiders on vineyards would leave something for the owners. However, God would leave nothing when He came through with His judgment. **Esau:** The father of the nation stands for the nation. Esau's heritage had little respect among the nations because of the legacy that he had passed on to his descendants. **Ransacked:** The nation would be stripped of everything. She would be left a desolate nation, and thus abandoned. **Men who were at peace with you:** Edom would fall through treachery. Those with whom she had made alliances would turn on her, and thus there would be no major battles or calamity that would befall the capital. God would bring down this nation through a process of international events.

The Edomites as a nation would disappear from the civilizations of the world by a dissipation of their race among the nations. What eventually happened in the history of the Edomites was that in the 6th and 5th centuries B.C., the Edomites were eventually forced from their country by the Arabians who migrated westward from Arabia. Many Edomites eventually settled in the southern regions of Palestine, from which group came the family of Herod the Great whom Octavian eventually established as a king over Judea before the birth of Jesus. Thus through migration, the Edomites were dislodged from their secure location in the rocks of the Sinai Peninsula. **Teman:** This was the primary city of Edom that was located only a few kilometers from the naturally fortified city of Petra.

REASONS FOR JUDGMENT

10-14 Against your brother: Obadiah lists the sins of the Edomites against the Israelites, their brethren. When the Israelites were oppressed, the Edomites took advantage of their calamity. Edom's sins involved unloving acts of antagonism against Israel (See Nm 20:14-21). These acts of antagonism reached their climax when Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians in 586 B.C. It was a time when the Edomites stood afar off, waiting for the city to fall. **You were as one of them:** Because the Edomites stood idly by when Jerusalem was under siege, her indifference made her a partaker with Nebuchadnezzar's army. To make matters worse for the Israelites, the

Edomites took part in the plundering of the city of Jerusalem after it fell to the Babylonians. From the text, it seems that the Edomites even aided the Babylonians as they plundered the city. ***Stood in the fork:*** In some way the Edomites collaborated with the Babylonians in both plundering the city and in making sure that the escaping Israelites were taken into captivity by the Babylonians. By behaving in such a treacherous manner, the Edomites possibly sought to save themselves from the Babylonians. They thus sacrificed their brother for the purpose of saving themselves from destruction (See Jr 49:7-22; 2 Kg 24).

THE DAY OF THE LORD

15-18 *Day of the Lord:* This was a great day of calamity that came from the Lord on those against whom the Lord had set His judgment (Jl 1:15; 3:14; Zp 1:7). In this judgment against Edom, the judgment was more than a victory of one nation over another. It was against the Edomite race. ***Return on your own head:*** The Edomites would reap what they had sown (See Mt 6:14,15; 18:21-35; Lk 6:31; Gl 6:7-10; Js 2:13). ***Swallow down:*** The Edomites would be devoured by the nations of the world. They would be devoured to the point that it would be as if they never existed as a nation (See Jr 25:15-28). ***Deliverance ... holiness:*** The surrounding nations that persecuted and were antagonists against Israel would go out of existence as independent nations. Some would cease to exist as a race of people, being assimilated into the races of conquering nations.

But the Israelites would continue to exist in history, though not as an independent nation within the borders of Palestine. Israel would continue to exist in holiness in the sense that she would remain separated from the nations of the world. She would maintain her identity as a people. ***Possess their possessions:*** When the Jews returned from Babylonian captivity in 536 B.C., the Medo-Persian Empire allowed them to take possession of their former lands. However, the returnees were still under the control of the Medo-Persian Empire. God, through the Medo-Persian Empire, protected the land rights of the returned Jews. God used foreign nations as the Assyrians and Babylonians to discipline Israel. But He also used foreign nations as the Medo-Persians, Greeks and Romans to protect His people in the land. God knew that His people after their return from captivity would never be a strong military nation, and thus He used other nations in order to preserve the Jewish race until the coming of the Messiah, at which time He dissolved physical Israel into spiritual Israel, the church (See comments Gl 3:26-29). ***Not be any remaining ... of Esau:*** As a race of people who would be identified as a nation, the Edomites would cease to exist (See Is 11:13,14). ***House of Jacob:*** After the Babylonian captivity, the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel would be restored as one nation (Js 1:1; Ez 37:16-22).

19-21 *The south:* Or, the Negev. When the Israelites went into captivity, the Edomites arose from their territory and claimed some of the lands of the Is-

raelites. But this would be reversed when the Israelites were allowed to return to Palestine by the Medo-Persians, who at the time in 536 B.C. controlled all the land of Palestine, and lands reaching down into Egypt. ***The captivity ... of the children of Israel:*** Reference here is to the captives of the northern kingdom of ten tribes that were taken into Assyrian captivity in 722/21 B.C. ***Captivity of Jerusalem:*** These would be those Israelites of Judah who were taken into Babylonian captivity in 586 B.C. All the captives of Israel, therefore, whether of the Assyrian or Babylonian captivities, would be returned to reclaim their pos-

sessions in the land of Palestine. There would thus be a restoration of a remnant of all twelve tribes. However, the Edomites would lose their land possession, never to be claimed again. ***Saviors:*** The wise rulers of the returned Israelites would be made rulers over any remnants of the Edomite race. ***The kingdom will be the Lord's:*** Verse 21 seems to be Messianic in the sense that from Israel would come the Savior who would be King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Tm 6:15). He would reign over all people, including any remnants of the Edomite race (Compare Ps 22:28; 103:19; Zc 14:9; Rv 11:15; see comments Ep 1:20-23).