

The Church of the Servant King

Prophecy Series

(Proph14B_Prophecy in the Prophets_Obadiah_Intro)

Introduction

The book of Obadiah is the shortest book in the Bible. In addition, it is the most obscure since we cannot be sure of the date of its composition and we know nothing of the author other than the meaning of his name – servant of Yahweh. The historical context of a biblical book is usually very critical to discerning its meaning. In the case of the book of Obadiah, there are two almost equally valid views as to the date of its composition. Yet, in spite of the fact that we can't know for sure when it was written, our understanding of the meaning of the book is not that greatly impacted.

Date of Writing: The question surrounding the date of the book's composition has much to do with which battle against Jerusalem involved the Edomites (see below for more information on the Edomites) in such a hostile manner against Judah (vv. 11-14). There were four significant invasions of Jerusalem during Israel's history.¹ They were:

- ❑ 926 B.C. – Shishak, king of Egypt, during Rehoboam's reign in Judah (1 Ki 14:25-26)²
- ❑ 848 to 841 B.C. – the Philistines and Arabians during the reign of Jehoram (2 Chron 21:16-17)³
- ❑ 790 B.C. – King Joash of Israel (Northern Kingdom) during the reign of Amaziah (2 Ki 14:13-14)⁴
- ❑ 605 to 586 B.C. – Babylonian conquest (2 Ki 24-25)

Obadiah most likely ministered and wrote this book in association with either the 2nd or 4th invasion since his ministry is directed against Edom, a nation to the south and east of Judah. The majority of scholars date the book immediately following the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.⁵ Several reasons are proffered to support this conclusion:⁶

- ❑ There is a great deal of similarity between Obadiah 1-9 and a passage in Jeremiah 49:7-22 who wrote in the late 7th to early 6th Century B.C. just before the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians.
- ❑ Obadiah speaks of the "Day of Yahweh" (v. 15) in such a way that implies the development of that phrase in similar fashion to that which we find in Joel and in Zephaniah who wrote later in the 6th Century B.C.

¹ See Charles C. Ryrie, *The Ryrie Study Bible* (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1976, 1978), "Introduction to the Book of Obadiah," 1372.

² See Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1987), 323-29.

³ *Ibid.*, 354.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 370.

⁵ See Earl D. Radmacher, General Editor, *The Nelson Study Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997), 1489.

⁶ Ronald B. Allen, "Notes on the Book of Obadiah" (Unpublished class notes for 304N, Old Testament Prophets. Dallas Theological Seminary, Spring 1996), 3. For an alternative view and reasons in support of a dating of Obadiah in association with invasion #2, see Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1987), 382.

- The verses in Obadiah seem to be more easily understood on the basis of a prior reading of Jeremiah 49 than the reverse, i.e. a reading of Obadiah makes a reading of Jeremiah 49 easier.

Therefore, it appears likely that the book of Obadiah was written shortly after the destruction of Jerusalem which Jeremiah had predicted and witnessed. This would make Obadiah a younger contemporary of Jeremiah. Obadiah's prophetic indictment against Edom's complicity in an attack on Jerusalem is most likely a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. by the Babylonians.

Who were the Edomites? The Edomites were descendant's of Jacob's twin brother, Esau. You might recall that Esau actually held the birthright since he was technically the older of the two brothers (Ge 25:24-26). However, Esau, the outdoorsman of the two and the favorite of his father, Isaac, sold his birthright to Jacob for a pot of stew (Ge 25:29-34). Thus, Esau did not value his spiritual heritage and God's commentary on the situation through Moses' pen was that Esau "despised his birthright" (Ge 25:34). We will see this same tendency – to not value or highly esteem one's spiritual heritage – among Esau's descendants – the Edomites.

It is interesting to note that the name "Edom" is associated with the adjective "red" in Hebrew and is related to the color of the pottage for which Esau sold his birthright (Ge 25:30). The same color characterized Esau himself at birth (Ge 25:25) and is prevalent in the sandstone cliffs of the region.⁷

From patriarchal times, the Edomites inhabited the region surrounding Mt. Seir and Edom was a well-established nation by the 13th Century B.C. During David's era (ca. 1000 B.C.), David brought Edom under subjection and relations with Judah were hostile from that point forward in Judah's history. Edom was sometimes known as the land of Seir due to the fact that Seir had been the ancestor of the Horites who occupied Edom before being displaced and assimilated by the Edomites (Ge 32:3; 36:20-30; Deut 2:4-5, 8; 2:12, 22, 29).⁸ In spite of periods of subjection, Edom retained its status as an independent monarchy during at least portions of its history (Jer 27:3).

What was the reason for Obadiah's ire toward the Edomites? Judah had been appropriately warned that if she continued along the same spiritual path of the Northern Kingdom, Israel, she too would experience the 5th cycle of discipline (Lev 26:27ff cf. Jer 2:1-6:30; 25:11). The judgment on Jerusalem was deserved, long predicted and just from the divine standpoint. Therefore, should Obadiah be upset at Edom for having been an agent God used to discipline Judah?

Certainly, God would use another nation to execute discipline against His own people and even hold that nation accountable for its actions against God's people (e.g. Isa 10:5-15; Jer 49:12; Zech 1:15). However, Edom was a brother nation to Judah who would have been expected to join Judah in confederation against any common enemies. It was one thing to be attacked by an unrelated enemy, but it was another to find a co-conspirator among one's own family. Edom participated in the cowardly act of hindering escapees in their escape from Judah

⁷ Frank E. Gaebelin, General Editor, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, electronic version (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976-1992).

⁸ Ibid. See also, Eugene Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 84 which states – "The biblical tradition indicates that the original inhabitants of Edom, formerly known as Seir, were the Horites, no doubt to be connected with the Hurrians of ancient Near Eastern texts. These Esau dispossessed both by his own strength and as a gracious act of Yahweh (Deut. 2:12, 22; see also Gen. 36)."

and of taking the defeated of Judah back to the conquering Babylonians.⁹ Edom even actively participated in the sacking of the city (v. 13).

Therefore, Edom was an even greater sinner than Babylon. Babylon was a true foreign power acting in its own self-interest and unwittingly being used by God to accomplish His judgment upon His people. Edom, on the other hand, had no such reason to effectively join forces with an enemy of Judah. Not only did she aide the enemy, she rejoiced over the fall of Judah (v. 12).

Eventually, the Edomite's pride and presumed self-sufficiency became their downfall. They believed that their fortress capitol of Sela (Petra) was impregnable. Some of the surrounding cliffs of the city were 2000 feet high. Eventually, their Arab neighbors turned against them and took over their land and their livelihood. The Edomites were pushed into southern Judah. In the 2nd Century B.C., the resurgent Jewish kingdom under the Maccabees conquered the Edomites and forcibly converted them to Judaism. By the time of Jesus' ministry, they were known as Idumeans.¹⁰

Structure and prophetic aspects: The book has three sections: 1) an introduction; 2) a central hub section; and 3) a final section focusing upon the hope of Judah.

- The *introductory section* (vv. 1-9), anticipates a "day" of the Lord (v. 8 cf. vv. 1, 4) in which Esau (Edom) would be cut down in battle by the nations (vv. 1-2).
- The central section (vv. 10-16) acts as a hub around which the remainder of the book revolves and relates. In this *central section* of the book, there is a day of calamity for Judah (Jacob – v. 10) who is cut down by Edom (Esau) in collaboration with foreigners (v. 11).
- In the final section (vv. 17-21), a "day" of the Lord is seen as coming in which the house of Jacob (Judah) will possess its inheritance (vv. 17, 19-20) and will consume Edom along with the other nations.¹¹

While it may appear that the book is intended for the people of Edom, in reality the book is about God and His people. The same thing is true of the book of Nahum which speaks of Nineveh. Nineveh is the backdrop for the book, but the people who were most affected by the words are the people of Israel. The Bible is for the people of God even though other nations are mentioned and play a role in God's dealings with His people, the Jews.

Accordingly, the book points to the glorious future of Israel and Judah in the latter days in the two oracles of salvation (vv. 17-18 and 19-21) at the end of the book. In so doing, the readers of the book learn about their sinful nature in contrast to God's grace and the glorious future that awaits God's people.¹²

Purpose: Even though the book or scroll of Obadiah was addressed to Edom, it is very unlikely that the leaders and people of Edom ever heard it or read it. Perhaps the major purpose of the book was to comfort and encourage the surviving Judeans with the message that God had not abandoned them and that Judah would one day be restored to the land of promise.

Brief Outline of the Book

⁹ Allen, "Notes," 8-10.

¹⁰ See Ryrie, *The Ryrie Study Bible*, 1373 and Radmacher, *The Nelson Study Bible*, 1489.

¹¹ Gabelein, "Expositor's Commentary."

¹² Allen, "Notes," 10.

- ❑ Edom's doom (vv. 1-9)
 - God's call to the nations and the certainty of Edom's destruction (v. 1)
 - Judgment oracle #1 – Edom's pride and the completeness of the disaster (vv. 2-9)
- ❑ The denunciation of Edom – (vv. 10-16)
 - Judgment oracle #2 – For unbrotherliness and aloofness (vv. 10-11)
 - Judgment oracle #3 – For aggressiveness and violence against Judah (vv. 12-14)
 - Judgment oracle #4 – The timing and nature of the destruction (vv. 15-16)
- ❑ Judah's restoration (vv. 17-21)
 - Salvation oracle #1 – Judah exalted over Edom (vv. 17-18)
 - Salvation oracle #2 – Judah exalted over the nations (vv. 19-21)

Notes


God's call to the nations and the certainty of Edom's destruction (v. 1) – Obadiah's choice of the name and title of God in this verse points to the sovereignty of God. The two words "Lord God" are the words "*adonai Yahweh*." They could be translated "sovereign God" or "sovereign Lord."¹³ In the book of Obadiah, God sovereignly works through other nations to accomplish His purpose with Judah, yet still holds those nations accountable for their actions and attitudes toward His own. God knows that ultimately, the actions and attitudes of other nations toward Judah reflect their actions and attitudes toward Him.

Principle: You can discern a nation's and a person's attitude toward Yahweh (Jesus Christ) by their attitude and views regarding Israel.

Principle: The trend of the Satanic cosmos has always been anti-Christ (1 Jn 4:3); therefore, the trend of the Satanic cosmos is increasingly anti-Israel.

Principle: The arrogance of cosmic thinking (i.e. cosmic II power sphere) is characterized by hatred and overt opposition toward the plan of God in human history through Israel and believers of the Church Age.

Application: Edom, like Arab countries today, had become reversionistic in policy and action toward Israel. Through negative volition toward God and His promises (e.g. the Abrahamic covenant to be fulfilled through Jacob's spiritual and physical lineage, not Esau's spiritual and physical lineage), mataiotes (⊙⊕◆⊗⊕⊕◆⊗⊗) or emptiness of the soul (Eph 4:17), and blackout and scar tissue (hardness) of the soul (Eph 4:18), the Edomites and Arab world have bought into the lie of cosmic II thinking.

Principle: The vacuum (⊙⊕◆⊗⊕⊕◆⊗⊗)  mataiotes) of the soul that is created through negative volition toward God and His plan makes the unbeliever or believer susceptible to Satan's lie that is propagated through religion.

Application: Arabic countries largely consist of descendants of Ishmael, Abraham's first-born son who was born not of God's promise to Abraham, but through an act of unbelief – copulation with Hagar, not Sarah.¹⁴ One example of how Satan has exploited that trend toward

¹³ Walter L. Baker, "Obadiah," in John F. Walvoord and Roy Zuck, editors, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament* (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1985), 1455.

¹⁴ "According to Scripture, the ancestors of modern Arabs can be traced back to Shem and are properly known as Semites. Shem's descendant Eber gave rise to two lines: Peleg's line, from which Abraham is descended, and Joktan's line, which contains the names of many

non-belief is by his fostering a new religion in the Arab world in the 7th Century A.D. called Islam. Islam is the world religion founded by an Arabian visionary named Mohammed or Muhammad who was born in the city of Mecca in Arabia. Muhammad claimed to receive supernatural revelations from God through the angel Gabriel. Since Muhammad was uneducated and could not read or write, some of his followers recorded his revelations and compiled them into a book known as the Koran (sometimes spelled Quran or Qur'an. Muhammed suffered from fits in his early life¹⁵ and was "peculiarly liable to morbid and fantastic hallucinations, and alterations of excitement and depression, which would win for him, in the eyes of his ignorant countrymen, the credit of being inspired."¹⁶ Muhammad and others were at first doubtful of the source of his revelations which often accompanied these experiences.¹⁷ Muhammad even wondered if the source might be an evil spirit.¹⁸ Early Islamic teachings have continued to guide Muslims in their attitude toward the Jews. Muslims believe that God gave the promised land to them, thus the land of Israel belongs to them, not the Jews. Among the many other Satanic inspired, deceptive lies contained in the Koran is the belief that the Jews are the enemies of Islam and must be destroyed.¹⁹ Many of the flags of modern Arab countries contain the crescent moon. Some scholars have traced the name for the god of Islam, Allah, to the Arabian moon god, Ilah.²⁰ Abram was called by Yahweh from the land of Ur of the Chaldeans (Ge 11:31), an area in which the moon god named Nannah had been worshipped for at least 1000 years before Abram.²¹

The Satanic deception of cosmic thought that is vacuumed into empty souls that are devoid of divine viewpoint is not a phenomenon relegated to Biblical times. It continues into the present day. In 1991, Islam was noted as being the 2nd largest religion in Europe and the 3rd largest in the United States. In 1991, it was projected that in ten years Islam would surpass the 1 billion mark in adherents.²² The Edomites (descendants of Esau) of Obadiah's day had

Arab groups. However, many Arab tribes trace their ancestry to Ishmael, the firstborn son of Abraham. The word Arab refers to nomads or Bedouins and may be connected with the word for desert or wilderness." See Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 1965, 1977, 1985, 1997), 613.

¹⁵ J.N.D. Anderson, ed., *The World's Religions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), 54, 60 quoted in John Ankerberg & John Weldon, *The Facts on Islam* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 1991), 9.

¹⁶ J.M. Rodwell, *The Koran* (New York: Dutton, Everyman's Library, 1977), 14 quoted in Ankerberg and Weldon, *The Facts on Islam*, 10.

¹⁷ J.N.D. Anderson, *The World's Religions*, 55, 80 quoted in Ankerberg and Weldon, *The Facts on Islam*, 10-11. See also, Alfred Guillaume, *Islam* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), 25, 28-29 quoted in Ankerberg and Weldon, *The Facts on Islam*, 10. See also, Arthur Jeffery, ed. *Islam: Muhammad and His Religion* (New York: Bobbe-Merrill Company), 16 quoted in Ankerberg and Weldon, *The Facts on Islam*, 13.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ George Grant, *The Blood of the Moon: The Roots of the Middle East Crisis* (Brentwood, Tennessee: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1991), 49 quoted in Ankerberg & Weldon, *The Facts on Islam*, 7.

²⁰ Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, 614.

²¹ J. McKee Adams, revised by Joseph A. Callaway, *Biblical Backgrounds* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1965), 11-13.

²² Ankerberg & Weldon, *The Facts on Islam*, 8.

succumbed to the same lie against the children of promise (descendants of Jacob) in alignment with their other relatives (the descendants of Ishmael).