

Book of Obadiah

Title:

The book is named after the prophet who received the vision (1:1).

Obadiah means “servant of the Lord” and occurs 20 times in the Old Testament, referring to many other Old Testament individuals.

Obadiah is the shortest book in the Old Testament and is not quoted in the New Testament.

Author – Date:

Nothing is known for certain about the author.

Other Old Testament references to men of this name do not appear to be referring to this prophet.

His frequent mentions of Jerusalem, Judah, and Zion suggest that he belonged to the southern kingdom (verses 10-12, 17, 21).

Obadiah was probably a contemporary of Elijah and Elisha.

He evidently preferred to be remembered in his prophetic role rather than as an individual, because he chose to relate no details of his personal life or history.

Twelve other men in the Old Testament are known by this name.

If the authorship of the prophecy were certain, the historical setting would be certain.

Conservatives tend to date the prophecy early, and liberal critics tend to date it late during the Chaldean period after the fall of Jerusalem to the Chaldeans (in 586 B.C.).

Such critics also attempt to deny the prophecy’s integrity and unity.

Though the date of writing is difficult to determine, we know it is tied to the Edomite assault on Jerusalem described (in verses 10-14).

Obadiah apparently wrote shortly after the attack.

There were 4 significant invasions of Jerusalem in Old Testament history:

- (1) By Shishak, king of Egypt (ca. 925 B.C.), during the reign of Rehoboam (1 Kings 14:25-26; 2 Chron. 12);

- (2) By the Philistines and Arabians (between 848-841 B.C.), during the reign of Jehoram of Judah (2 Chron. 21:8-20);
- (3) By Jehoash, king of Israel (ca. 790 B.C.; 2 Kings 14; 2 Chron. 25); and
- (4) By Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, in the fall of Jerusalem (in 586 B.C.).

Of these 4, only the second and the fourth are possible fits with historical data.

Historical Setting:

Obadiah's prophecy is written in Hebrew poetry, and the reader needs to be mindful of parallelism in interpreting it.

The balance between two or more similar words, phrases or clauses is called parallelism in grammar.

The structure of the Hebrew parallelism portrays the intense emotion with which the prophecy was delivered.

The general nature of the prophecy makes the setting of this book compatible with a wide range of dates (from the ninth to the early sixth century B.C.).

Accordingly scholars of all persuasions disagree over the date of Obadiah's prophecy.

However, no definitive reason exists to deny the integrity and essential unity of the book.

As well, the prophecy is elastic enough in its fulfillment to embrace all of the times of Edom's destruction, whether by the Chaldeans, who laid Edom waste (Jer. 49:7-22; Ezek. 35), and the Maccabees, Rome (A.D. 70), or ultimately when Christ executes the judgment of God on Edom and her allies (Isa. 63:1-6).

The purpose of Obadiah's prophecy is to pronounce God's judgment on Edom (Esau; verse 1), because of his actions toward his brother Judah (Jacob; verses 10-14).

The theme of the prophecy then, is the doom of Edom.

Background – Setting:

The Edomites trace their origin to Esau, the firstborn (twin), son of Isaac and Rebekah (Gen. 25:24-26), who struggled with Jacob even while in the womb (Gen. 25:22).

Esau's name means "hairy", because he was "all over like a hairy garment" (Gen. 25:25).

He is also called Edom, meaning "red", owing to the sale of his birthright in exchange for some red stew (Gen. 25:30).

He showed a disregard for the covenant promises by marrying two Canaanite women (Gen. 26:34), and later the daughter of Ishmael (Gen. 28:9).

He loved the out-of-doors and, after having his father's blessing stolen from him by Jacob, was destined to remain a man of the open spaces (Gen. 25:27; 27:38-40).

Esau settled in a region of mostly rugged mountains south of the Dead sea (Gen. 33:16; 36:8-9; Deut. 2:4-5), called Edom (Greek, "Idumea"), the 40 mile wide area which stretches approximately 100 miles south to the Gulf of Aqabah.

The famed King's Highway, an essential caravan route linking North Africa with Europe and Asia, passes along the eastern plateau (Num. 20:17).

The struggle and birth of Jacob and Esau (Gen. 25), form the ultimate background to the prophecy of (Gen. 25:23), "two nations are in your womb".

Their respective descendants, Israel and Edom, were perpetual enemies.

When Israel came out from Egypt, Edom denied their brother Jacob passage through their land, located south of the Dead sea (Num. 20:14-21).

Nevertheless, Israel was instructed by God to be kind to Edom (Deut. 23:7-8).

Obadiah, having received a vision from God, was sent to describe their crimes and to pronounce total destruction upon Edom because of their treatment of Israel.

The Edomites opposed Saul (ca. 1043 – 1011 B.C.), and were subdued under David (ca. 1011 – 971 B.C.).

They fought against Jehoshaphat (ca. 873 – 848 B.C.), and successfully rebelled against Jehoram (ca. 853 – 841 B.C.).

They were again conquered by Judah under Amaziah (ca. 796 – 767 B.C.), but they regained their freedom during the reign of Ahaz (ca. 735 – 715 B.C.).

Edom was later controlled by Assyria and Babylon; and in the fifth century B.C. the Edomites were forced by the Nabateans to leave their territory.

They moved to the area of southern Palestine and became known as Idumeans.

Herod the Great, and Idumean, became king of Judea under Rome (in 37 B.C.).

In a sense, the enmity between Esau and Jacob was continued in Herod's attempt to murder Jesus.

The Idumeans participated in the rebellion of Jerusalem against Rome and were defeated along with the Jews by Titus (in 70 A.D.).

Ironically, the Edomites applauded the destruction of Jerusalem (in 586 B.C.; compare Psalm 137:7), but died trying to defend it (in 70 A.D.).

After that time, they were never heard of again.

As Obadiah predicted, they would be "cut off forever" (verse 10); and there would be "no survivor of the house of Esau" (verse 18).

Historical – Theological Themes:

Obadiah is a case study of the curses/blessings (in Gen. 12:1-3), with two interrelated themes:

(1) The judgment of Edom by God for cursing Israel. This was apparently told Judah, thereby providing reassurance that the Lord would bring judgment upon Edom for her pride and for her participation in Judah's downfall;

(2) Judah's restoration. This would even include the territory of the Edomites (verses 19-21; Isaiah 11:14).

Obadiah's blessing for Judah includes the near fulfillment of Edom's demise (verses 1-14), and the far fulfillment of the nations' judgment and Israel's final possession of Edom (verses 15-21).