Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Obadiah
Scripture: Obadiah
Code: MSB31

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 OT, referring to at least 20 other OT individuals. Obadiah is the shortest book in the OT and is not quoted in the NT.

Author and Date

Nothing is known for certain about the author. Other OT 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 (cf. vv. 10–12,17,21). Obadiah was probably a contemporary of Elijah and Elisha.

The date of writing is equally difficult to determine, though we know it is tied to the Edomite assault on Jerusalem described in vv. 10–14. Obadiah apparently wrote shortly after the attack. There were 4 significant invasions of Jerusalem in OT history: 1) by Shishak, king of Egypt, ca. 925 B.C. during the reign of Rehoboam (1 Kin. 14:25,26; 2 Chr. 12); 2) by the Philistines and Arabians between 848–841 B.C. during the reign of Jehoram of Judah (2 Chr. 21:8–20); 3) by Jehoash, king of Israel, ca. 790 B.C. (2 Kin. 14; 2 Chr. 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. Number two is preferable, since Obadiah’s description does not indicate the total destruction of the city, which took place under Nebuchadnezzar’s attack. Also, although the Edomites were involved inNebuchadnezzar’s destruction of Jerusalem (Ps. 137; Lam. 4:21), it is significant that Obadiah does not mention the Babylonians by name (as with all the other prophets who wrote about Jerusalem’s fall), nor is there any reference to the destruction of the temple or the deportation of the people; in fact, the captives appear to have been taken to the SW, not E to Babylon (cf. v. 20).

Background and 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 like a hairy garment all over” (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 S of the Dead Sea (Gen. 33:16; 36:8,9; Deut. 2:4,5) called Edom (Gr., "Idumea"), the 40 mi. wide area which stretches approximately 100 mi. S to the Gulf of Aqabah. The fabled 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 S 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.) and Solomon (ca. 971–931 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, an 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 A.D. 70. Ironically, the Edomites applauded the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. (cf. Ps. 137:7) but died trying to defend it in A.D. 70. After that time they were never heard of again. As Obadiah predicted, they would be "cut off forever" (v. 10); "and no survivor shall remain of the house of Esau" (v. 18).

Historical and Theological Themes

The book is a case study of Gen. 12:1–3, with two interrelated themes: 1) the judgment of Edom by God for cursing Israel. This was apparently told to Judah, thereby providing reassurance to Judah that the Day of the Lord (v. 15) 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 (vv. 19–21; Is. 11:14). Obadiah's blessing includes the near fulfillment of Edom's demise (vv. 1–15) under the assault of the Philistines and Arabians (2 Chr. 21:8–20) and the far fulfillment of the nation's judgment in the first century A.D. and Israel's final possession of Edom (vv. 15–21).

Interpretive Challenges

The striking similarity between Obad. 1–9 and Jer. 49:7–22 brings up the question: Who borrowed from whom? Assuming there was not a third common source, it appears that Jeremiah borrowed, where appropriate, from Obadiah, since the shared verses form one unit in Obadiah, while in Jeremiah they are scattered among other verses.

Outline

I. God’s Judgment on Edom (1–14)

A. Edom’s Punishment (1–9)

B. Edom’s Crimes (10–14)

II. God’s Judgment on the Nations (15,16)

III. God’s Restoration of Israel (17–21)

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