

Obadiah

“As you have done, it shall be done to you;
Your reprisal shall return upon your own head.” (Obad 15)

Authorship

There is no personal information about Obadiah. His name means “Servant of Yahweh,” though it has been noted that this is according to the Septuagint and Vulgate vocalization whereas the Hebrew vocalization renders “worshipper of Yahweh.”¹ If the former is accepted, the prophet’s name may throw emphasis on his relationship to the message delivered by the Lord. If the latter is correct it may be showing contrast to the attitude of the objects of Obadiah’s prophecy, the Edomites, who in overweening pride disdained Yahweh, evidenced in their ill-treatment of His special people.

Date

The dating of Obadiah is most problematic since it all depends on internal allusion to events and possible literary dependence. The main issue is identification of the events described in Obadiah 10-14. The two main options are the Babylonian destruction of 586 B.C. and the Philistine-Arab action during the reign of King Jehoram, ca. 845 B.C. Objection to the latter date centers mostly on the idea that 2 Kings 8:20 and 2 Chronicles 21:8-17 do not make reference “to the kind of total conquest that is described in verse 11 (. . . foreigners entered his gate and cast lots for Jerusalem’).”² However, it is unreasonable to conclude that this poetic description of Jerusalem’s experience *clearly* describes a “total conquest.” The other source of information for dating are the literary affinities between Obadiah 1-5 and Jeremiah 49:14-16, and 9. Apparently either one used the other or they were both using a common source. There are extensive arguments for both sides. What is most problematic with the late date is imagining that Judah would be distraught over an Edomite role in the 586 B.C. destruction, given that it was Babylon who had been the real destroyer. In fact Babylon is notably absent from Obadiah, Judah’s enemies being listed as Esau (Edom) and the Philistines (19). The identification of the incursion does not materially alter the message of the book since the issue is judgment on Edom’s prideful hostility against

¹ Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 386.

² C. Hassell Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 260.

her brother, Judah. The early date, that is mid to late-ninth century, seems to be the most reasonable for Obadiah's prophecy.³

Historical Setting

Judah and Edom had experienced a long history of animosity dating from their progenitors, the brothers Jacob and Esau. Israel had brought them into submission under the early monarchy, yet rebellion and hostility was continual. During Jehoram's reign (853-841 B.C.) a Philistine/Arab coalition had sacked Jerusalem and carried off captives including most of the king's family. Edom had not only gloated over this happening but had joyously participated in plundering Jerusalem. It was not the worst that would happen to Israel. However, God judges motives and Edom had become liable to judgment for her insolent and mean pride.

Original Readers / Occasion

Though the prophecy is directed against Edom for its action against Jerusalem during the Philistine/Arab invasion, it was written for Judah that she might take comfort in the fact that God was just and would bring retribution on those who afflicted the seed of Abraham (Gen 12:3). It also contributed to the development of the concept of the Day of the Lord, which would be instructive for later readers.

Theme Statement

Hostile treatment of the nation of Israel, the seed of Abraham, will not go unpunished because the Lord is ever mindful of his people and will bring retribution on the deserving; this is the principle of the Day of the Lord for the nations.

Outline

- I. Judgment against Edom predicted: Her destruction would be total.1-9
 - A. Yahweh issues a call to battle Edom.1
 - 1. Obadiah receives the vision of the call concerning Edom.1a
 - 2. Yahweh has called the nations against Edom.1b
 - B. Yahweh pronounces judgment upon Edom.2-9
 - 1. Edom will be cast down despite her sense of security.2-4
 - 2. Edom will be completely searched out and plundered by her own confederates.5-7
 - 3. Edom will be divested of all her wisdom.8-9
- II. Judgment against Edom validated: The treacherous treatment of her brother Jacob had been reprehensible.10-14
 - A. She had done violence against Judah as a foreigner.10-11
 - B. She rejoiced openly over Judah's misfortune.12
 - C. She participated in Jerusalem's plundering.13

³ For arguments for the early date see Charles Dyer and Gene Merrill, *The Old Testament Explorer* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 2001), 765-66; Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1987, 1996), 382, 384; and Hobart E. Freeman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1968), 139-42.

D.	She had aided in Judah’s captivity.....	14
III.	The Day of the Lord upon the nations is near.	15-21
A.	The principle of the Day of the Lord is stated: it will be a day of retribution for all nations.	15-16
B.	The promise of the Day of the Lord affirmed: it will be a day of deliverance for Israel.	17-21
1.	Israel will be saved and become an instrument of judgment against Edom.....	17-18
2.	Israel shall acquire the lands of her enemies.	19-20
3.	Zion will be the capital of the Kingdom of Yahweh.....	21

Theme Statement

Hostile treatment of the nation of Israel, the seed of Abraham, will not go unpunished because the Lord is ever mindful of his people and will bring retribution on the deserving; this is the principle of the Day of the Lord for the nations.

Theme Development

I. Judgment against Edom predicted: Her destruction would be total (1-9).

Obadiah was given a vision of the Day of the Lord as it would apply to one of Israel’s closest neighbors and its nearest kin, Edom. The message proceeds from the pronouncement of judgment, to the reasons for judgment, to Israel’s contrasting expectations in the Day of the Lord.

The nations are called by Yahweh to rise up to battle against Edom (1). Whereas she had exalted herself in a false sense of security (Edom was situated in rugged territory—3) she would be humbled and despised (2, 4). Whereas a common thief would only steal what he might be able to use, Yahweh was going to strip Edom bare (5-6) and do it by means of those who had formerly been her confederates (7). Noted for her sages (Job’s friend Eliphaz was from Teman), the Lord would destroy wisdom and leave the country in dismay (9).

II. Judgment against Edom validated: The treacherous treatment of her brother Jacob had been reprehensible (10-14).

The justification for Edom’s treatment centered on the ignoble way in which she had treated her “brother Jacob.” Edom was descended from Esau (cf. 19) and Israel (Jacob) from his twin Jacob. Israel had been told specifically never to afflict Edom out of respect for this relationship. But Edom had utterly disdained her relative. She had acted as a foreigner in participating in a sacking of Jerusalem (10-11) and had rejoiced openly over Judah’s misfortune (12). The wisdom of Yahweh had cautioned against rejoicing over the affliction of an enemy, not to mention a friend (Prov 24:17). She had participated in Jerusalem’s plundering (13) and had prevented flight of its inhabitants so that they might be turned over to their enemies (in this case the Philistines and Arabians) (14).

III. The Day of the Lord upon the nations is near (15-21).

At this point in the prophecy, the focus shifts to the “Day of the Lord upon all the nations.” This refers in the prophets to any situation in which God is acting on behalf of Israel for their purification and preparation. The nations are involved because part of Israel’s restoration will be the judgment of the nations who had afflicted them and the elevation of Israel to be their head. The rest of the book looks beyond any immediate judgment upon Edom to the ultimate outcome of the Day of the Lord as it pertains to the fortunes of Israel.

First, Obadiah reviews the principle of the Day of the Lord as it pertains to the nations; it is one of retribution—“As you have done, it shall be done to you” (15). Though there will be grace for anyone in the nations who submits to Yahweh in faith, as a whole the Gentiles will be the recipients of the retributive justice of God. But then, Obadiah suddenly turns to what Israel can expect in that Day. Mount Zion (Jerusalem) will experience deliverance and its inhabitants will be holy (17). Whereas Judah had been the object of affliction by the nations, she would become their devouring fire (18). And whereas the Gentiles had taken her into captivity and overrun her lands, she would inherit all the territory of her enemies as her own possession (19-20). In other words the kingdom of God will have been established on earth and Israel will stand at the head of the nations.

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