

## Obadiah

### 1A. Historical Background

In general, the background for the book of Obadiah is the relationship between Israel and Edom. This relationship began with the two sons of Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Esau (Gen. 25:21-26). God gave these children to Rebecca and told her before they were born that the elder shall serve the younger.

The younger was renamed Israel (Gen. 32:28) and from his twelve sons came the nation of Israel. The elder became the father of the Edomites (Gen. 36:1, 9).

Esau's descendants settled "in the hill country of Seir" ("say-ear" Gen. 36:9). If we think of the top portions of the Red Sea as an index finger and left thumb, Seir is located between the thumb of the Red Sea and the Dead Sea. By the time of Christ, they were pushed northward and became the land of Idumea that bordered the southern end of Judea (Mk. 3:8).

During the wilderness wanderings the Edomites refused passage of Moses and the Israelites through their land (Num. 20:14-21; Judg. 11:17-18) so Israel turned away from them (Num. 20:21) and traveled "around the hill country of Seir" (Deut. 2:1).

After Israel settled the land of Canaan, Edom was a *continual military opponent*. David's victories "everywhere he went" included Edom (2 Sam. 8:14). In the divided kingdom period, Edomites often made raids against Judah (2 Chron. 20; 21:8-10) even taking away prisoners when Ahaz was looking to Assyria for aid against the northern kingdom (2 Chron. 28:16-17).

In particular historically, like the other Palestinian peoples, Edom became a vassal state to Assyria and then to Babylon. What stimulated the message of the book of Obadiah was the plundering of Judah and Jerusalem after the fall of the southern kingdom to Nebuchadnezzar in 586 by the Edomites who added *insult to injury* when they took advantage of the people of God that remained in the homeland, broken and vulnerable under the sword of God's judgment.

### 2A. Literary Analysis

#### 1B. Addressee

Obadiah speaks to the nations represented by Edom on behalf of Israel (v. 20). Specifically, it is a message to the children of Jacob who were overrun by strangers, and, as the Israelites fled, they were cut down at the crossroads by the people of Esau's mountains (vs. 10, 14). Jacob's brother (Esau) seized his wealth in the day of disaster (vs. 10, 13).

#### 2B. Contents

##### 1C. The nations are summoned against Edom (1-8)

There will be battle, ransacking, and destruction (1, 6, 8). The prophet is an envoy sent to the nations with a message from the Lord (1, cf. Ehud's message from the Lord against Eglon in Judges 3:20-21).

##### 2C. The basis for judgment is expounded (9-14)

It is because Edom did violence to his brother plundering Israel like an aloof stranger (11, 13) that he will experience the day of trouble and destruction (8) from ally and friend (7).

##### 3C. The Day of the Lord is announced (15-21)

###### 1) Judgment on all nations (15-16)

"Edom's experience of the Day of the Lord is but a harbinger of a yet greater day of divine wrath against his enemies and vindication for his people" (IOT 389).

###### 2) Deliverance for Mount Zion (17-21)

Then the kingdom will be the Lord's when Mount Zion will govern the mountains of Esau.

### 3A. Message

1B. God is just.

He will triumph over injustice (cf. 9-14 with 15).

To those in tragic circumstances under oppression by their neighbors, "Obadiah holds out confidence in the triumph of divine justice and God's ultimate purposes" (IOT 390).

2B. God is universal ruler.

His word summons the nations; it is effective across time. "He orders the history of nations and reveals his will to his prophets" (IOT 389).

He will save the fallen nations of the earth. None who oppose Israel will survive (Obad. 18). But *there will be a remnant of Edom* and the nations in the restored Eden (Amos 9:12). Thus Obadiah 18 is balanced by verse 21 and Amos 9:12.

3B. God is covenant keeper.

God promised that whoever curses Abraham will be cursed (Gen. 12:3). Therefore, the "stranger"/"foreigner" Edom and all foreigners will have their deeds return upon their own heads (Obad. 15).

God revealed His plan for Edom before the birth of Esau. The elder will serve the younger. Seeking to throw off this yoke in opposition to the purposes of God will be frustrated. The Idumean/Edomite, Herod the Great, will fail to destroy Abraham's son through Isaac and Jacob (Matt. 2:16). In the Lord's kingdom (v. 21) Edomites and all nations will bow the knee to the younger son of Isaac (Jacob → Christ).

### 4A. Theme

*Edom* and the nations will be judged in the day of God's wrath when, via the remnant, the kingdom will be the Lord's.

### 5A. Message for us

How is the remnant formed? Jacob and Esau show us that it is by God's election of grace (Rom. 9:13) in which all who are saved become the new Israel.

How are we to understand the place of Mount Esau and Mount Zion when "the kingdom shall be the Lord's" (v. 21)? [cf. all the land references in 19-20] Should we not understand this to mean that all lands of the earth will be Israel's land, owned by the kingdom that is the Lord's? If so, is this not now the case in the coming of the kingdom and Christ's enthronement? Is it now the case that Zion's king rules the earth by the gospel that is being preached throughout the cities of the land of Israel, which have become the cities of the earth, and this preaching will continue throughout these cities until Christ returns (cf. Mat 10)?