

II. OBADIAH

A. Date and author

1. Date

This book, the shortest in the OT (21 verses) is one of the most difficult to date.

The differences are not just those of a liberal or conservative viewpoint, and they range from about 840 B.C. to shortly after the destruction of Jerusalem (586 B.C.), to as late as 450 B.C.

The crux of the dating question lies in the identification of the plundering of Jerusalem that is mentioned in vss. 10-11 and possibly on to vs. 14.

The most likely identifications are (cf. Freeman, p. 140):

- a. *During the reign of Jehoram of Judah (848-841 B.C.) a coalition of Philistines and Arabians made an attack on Judah. See 2 Chron. 21:8,10,16,17; compare 2 Kgs 8:20-22 ("in his [Jehoram's] days Edom revolted").*

(Ahab, 874-853 B.C. Jehoram (of Judah) was the brother-in-law of Jehoram of the N.K. and married to Athaliah).

It is possible that the Edomites cooperated in this invasion and shared in the spoils.

- b. *The destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. Some claim that Ezek 35:5 supports this identification. But the reference is not conclusive. Because Edom later took a similar position at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem (cf. Psalm 137:7) is not proof that they had not done something similar at an earlier time.*

Objections to the 586 B.C. date:

There is no mention of deportation of the whole population as occurred in 586 B.C. There is no mention of the destruction of the city and temple nor is there any mention of Nebuchadnezzar (see, Laetsch, pp. 201, 202, 203).

Also the interpretation of vss. 10,11 and 12-14 as having two different points of reference must be considered (more about this later).

The similar phraseology in Jeremiah 49:7ff. indicates a relationship to Obadiah 1-6. Opinions are divided, however, on which is the original, or whether both reflect acquaintance with some other unknown prophecy.

- c. *Attack on Judah by Israel and Syria during the time of Ahaz was accompanied by a simultaneous attack by Edom (2 Chron 28:17-18). The reign of Ahaz is ca. 735-715 B.C. This identification is held by J. B. Payne.*

Some advocates of the date shortly after 587 B.C.:

New Scofield Reference Bible
J. A. Thompson, NBD.
G. H. Livingston, Wycliff Bible Commentary
C. L. Feinberg, The Major Messages of the Minor Prophets
T. J. Finley, WEC
NIVSB - prefers
L. C. Allen, NICOT, early post-exilic period
D. W. Baker, TOTC.

An advocate of a still later date:

R. K. Harrison, OTI, ca. 450 B.C.

Some advocates of the 840 B.C. date:

G. L. Archer, SOTI
H. E. Freeman, IOTP
M. F. Unger, Unger's
Bible Dictionary
E. J. Young, OTI - sometime before Jeremiah - (Jeremiah 49:7-22 similar to Obadiah and probably dependent upon it)
Keil & Delitzsch
J. J. Niehaus, An Exegetical and Expository Commentary on the Minor Prophets, T. E. McComiskey, Editor.

Obadiah = servant of the LORD. We know nothing about his personal life. There are several other Obadiah's mentioned in the OT but there is no basis for identification

(Cf. Servant of Ahab, 1 Kgs 18:1-16; teacher of law under Jehoshaphat, 2 Chron. 17:7; overseer under Josiah, 2 Chron 34:12).

B. The Theme of the Book

It is a pronouncement of judgment on Edom

The Edomites were the descendants of Esau (Gen 36:1,8,9; cf., blessing on Jacob and Esau, Gen 27:28,39)

Gen 36:8 tells us that Esau dwelt in the hill country of Seir. Seir is the chief mountain range of Edom and is often used as a synonym for the whole land. It is directly south of the Dead Sea, especially the mountainous country east of the depression connecting the Dead Sea with the Gulf of Aqabah.

Edom's principle cities were Bozrah, Teman and Sela. Sela which means crag or rock is possibly to be identified with the famous city of Petra occupied in latter times by the Nabatean Arabs (4th cen. B.C.).

From Ezion-Geber on the Gulf of Aqabah the King's Highway ran north through Edom. It was along this route that Moses wanted to lead the Israelites at the time of the Exodus. Edom's refusal to allow passage is recorded in Num. 20:14-21. The antagonism which is seen here continued for centuries. David conquered Edom (2 Sam 8:13-14), but there were continued conflicts between the Israelites and Edom throughout the kingdom period.

Here is the ultimate outworking of the Jacob-Esau controversies of Genesis.

Keil, p. 360. (CC. 38). Wrong or violence is all the more reprehensible when it is committed against a brother.

C. Comments on the content.

OUTLINE:

I. JUDGMENT ON EDOM - VERSES 1-9

- II. REASON FOR THE JUDGMENT - VERSES 10-11
- III. WARNING FOR THE FUTURE - VERSES 12-14
- IV. FUTURE JUDGMENT ON ALL THE UNGODLY - VERSES 15-16
- V. RESTORATION AND BLESSING FOR ISRAEL - VERSES 17-21

Verse 2.

הָגָה קָטָן נִתְהַיַּךְ בַּגּוֹיִם Prophetic perfect? KJV: "have made". NIV: "will make."

Is the reference to a coming judgment or to a past historical reality, ie., that Edom was a small insignificant people, never a great empire? In context it seems to be a reference to a coming judgment.

Verse 3.

שֹׁכְנֵי בְּחַגְוֵי-סֻלְעַ - "you who live in the clefts of the rock" or is this a proper name? A reference to the city Petra?

Petra

Petra was a great city in ancient times, but was completely forgotten for about 1000 years until a Swiss explorer Johann Ludwig Burckhardt rediscovered it in 1812.

Entrance to the city, which is in a valley surrounded by mountains, is only by a winding canyon or *siq*. In places this is as narrow as 12 feet. A stream flows along this canyon during the rainy season. At places the walls of the canyon rise 200 feet. This means that the city was easily defended in ancient times.

Unexpected rainstorms can cause flash floods which sweep through the canyon up to a depth of 20 feet. Twenty French tourists died in such a flash flood in 1963.

The view that greets the traveler upon reaching the end of the canyon is spectacular. Directly opposite the opening into the city area is the building known as the Treasury (Al-Khazneh) that is cut into the red sandstone rock with a facade of about 130 ft. high with columns, cornices, urns etc.

Many more buildings are found in an area of about 1 mile by 3/4 of a mile, most of which are cut out of the sides of the barren sandstone mountains that surround the valley.

Verses 4-9.

מִשָּׁם אֲרִידָךְ - "I will bring you down"

Best understood as a prediction of Edom's loss of her territory that was fulfilled historically by their defeat at the hands of the Nabatean Arabs.

These people, a nomadic Arab tribe, came from Nabaioth in the region of Kedar in northern Arabia.

From Malachi 1:3-5 (ca. 430 B.C.) it appears that the Edomites had already been driven from Mount Seir by these Arabs.

In time, the Nabatean kingdom extended up into the Transjordan region as far as Damascus. By NT times Damascus was held by King Aretas of a Nabatean dynasty (Aretas IV's daughter married Herod Antipas).

The dispossessed Edomites settled in an area of southern Judah which eventually became known as Idumea (Greek form of the Hebrew אֲדוּמַיִם), where they maintained an independent existence for a time until they were conquered by John Hyrcanus (135-105 B.C.) and were forcibly converted to Judaism (circumcision, law observance, etc.). In the following century the dynasty of Herod the Great, descended from Idumean stock came into control of the kingdom of Judah. After Roman times the Edomites disappear as a people. The few Edomites that remained seem to have been lost among the Arabs and the very name disappears from history.

Verses 10,11

Reason for the judgment.

Verses 12-14

Warning for the future.

There is a question whether these verses have reference to the past (cf., e.g. Allen, 156, and other commentators who date the book after the destruction of Jerusalem), the present, or the future (i.e., to the time of Obadiah).

Allen, (NICOT, 156,157) attempts to deal with the tense issue of the verbal forms in these verses by arguing that "in highly imaginative fashion the prophet speaks of events in the past as if they were still present." Neihaus (EECMP, Vol 2., p. 497) comments: "It is difficult to understand these prohibitions to have anything other than a future event in view. The NRSV translates the prohibitions as perfects [should not have], but this is grammatically untenable."

There are 8 Jussive forms - frequently taken as referring to events that have already occurred, and therefore a reference to the same incident described in verses 10-11.

Various translations:

KJV: "thou shouldst not have. . . "

NASB: "do not"

JPSV: "How could you . . ." But footnote says: Lit. "Do not . . ."

NIV: "you should not . . ."

NLT: "you shouldn't have"

Yet Keil, (p. 363), I believe correctly, says that the jussive cannot be taken as "a future of the past" (shouldst not have . . .).

Keil concludes that it is neither past nor future specifically but an ideal event that includes both. This seems to me to be too abstract.

Laetsch (p. 202, cf., Bibliography, p. 11) views 11-14 as an eyewitness description of the present, and thus finds the warning of 12-14 as appropriate. He places it in the time of Jehoram (cf., 2 Chron 21:16,17; ca 840 B.C.).

Gaebelein (p. 13-15) says vss. 10-14 applies initially to 2 Chron 21:16 (Jehoram's time) but had a fuller fulfillment in the Babylonian captivity of Jerusalem (a double reference).

It seems to me that although Laetsch's present sense is possible, a future reference is intended in vss 12-14; and that while vss 10-11 and vss 12-14 refer to similar actions by the Edomites, vss 10-11 refer to past actions (probably in the time of Jehoram), but vss 12-14 are warnings for the future that Edom ignored at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.

Aalders (pp. 35,36), similar to Allen, sees the jussives as a rhetorical form in which facts of the past are described. Vss 12-14 speak of the same event as vss. 11,12. In Aalder's view the jussives should be translated as "do not . . ."

J. A. Eaton (Torch Com) p. 42,43. The pleadings are a sad irony, for the choice of evil has already been made. They can only serve now to mirror the offenses already committed, showing up their pitiless and despicable character.

Hengstenberg (p. 400) "The prophet exhorts the Edomites neither to rejoice nor to cooperate in the destruction of Jerusalem, because, other wise they would certainly receive the well-merited reward of such wickedness committed against the Covenant people to whom they were so nearly related . . ."

One may object, as for example Aalders does, that it is strange for a judgment to be pronounced on Edom in vss. 10-11 and then a warning given concerning the future in vss 12-14.

But notice Jeremiah 18:5-10. Conditional?

Also notice Amos 2:13-16; 3:2; 3:11-15; 4:1-3; 5:27; 6:14 etc., yet compare 5:4-9,14,15.

Verses 15,16

Future judgment on all the ungodly.

Here we have a transition from Edom to the heathen in general. "For the *Day of the LORD* is near upon *all the nations*."

Provided our dating is correct - this is the first use of the expression "The Day of the LORD" in the Old Testament.

THE DAY OF THE LORD

In general terms the "day of the LORD" is a day in which the LORD will bring judgment on his enemies and blessing to his people.

The term is used rather frequently in many of the prophetic books. Variations occur such as "the day of His anger" (Zeph 2:2); "the day of the LORD's wrath" (Ez 7:19).

It seems to be a term known and understood by the people even with the earlier prophets (cf., Amos 5:18,20). Here the people desire the coming of the Day of the LORD. The general expectation was that the Day would be one of blessing for Israel, but Amos tells them to expect the reverse (vs. 20).

If the day of the LORD was a well known expression, what does it mean?

It is not difficult to determine that it is inseparably tied to God's judgment (cf., Joel 1:15). The popular conception was that this would be a day of judgment on Israel's enemies only, and that it would therefore be a day of blessing for Israel (Amos 5:18). Joel and Amos warn against this idea and then on the basis of the coming of the Day of the LORD call the people to repentance with their whole heart (Joel 2:11-13).

But we may ask is the expression the "Day of the LORD" to be considered as referring to one specific day - and if so, when is it to be?

When we look at the various usages it is difficult to understand them all as reference to one specific day. In Isa 13:6,9 the day is apparently the time of Babylon's destruction. In Jer. 46:10 the Day of the LORD of Hosts is the day of the battle at Carchemish (a battle involving Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon, 605 B.C.) in which Egypt suffered defeat. In other places it is often difficult to determine the exact concrete time, but it is clear that it is not always the same time.

It seems, then, that we are to understand the expression "the Day of the LORD" as referring not just to one particular day only, but as referring to special times of God's judging-punishing activity. Sometimes there is an eschatological context (cf., Joel 3:14-21; Mal 4:5), but one cannot say that the Day of the LORD in prophecy is always the day of judgment at the end of the world. It would seem that manifestations of God's judging-punishing activity that foreshadow that final judgment are also referred to by the expression "the Day of the LORD."

Verse 15.

What is the connection between Edom's judgment and the judgment of all the nations. See Keil, p. 367. (CC. 39).

Verse 16.

"Just as *you* drank . ." Who is addressed?

"you" - *Edomites* in triumph OR, *Jews* in tasting God's judgment?

Against understanding the Jews:

Edom is addressed, not Judah in the whole prophecy of Obadiah. The parallelism is "As you [Edom] have done" (vs. 15) / "Just as you drank . ." (vs. 16).

This means that "drank"/ "drink" is used in two ways:

1. In carousing, triumph (1st phrase)
2. In tasting judgment (2nd phrase) cf., Jer 25:15,16; 49:12; Isa 51:17

Verses 17-21.

Future blessing for Israel

How are these verses to be understood?

1. SOME SUGGEST THE PASSAGE IS TO BE SPIRITUALIZED AND UNDERSTOOD AS DESCRIPTIVE OF THE EXTENSION OF GOD'S KINGDOM THROUGH THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL.

Laetsch, 207.

Briefly stated, we have here the future history of Judah-Jerusalem, the Church of God (vv. 17, 18a), of its enemies (vv. 18b, 19), of those members of the Church who are oppressed, held captive by the enemies (v. 20)."

Laetsch on vv. 17,18a

" . . . Jerusalem . . a very fitting symbol of the New Testament Church . . . On Mount Zion, within the Church of God, 'shall be deliverance' . . . literally, escape; that escape from the old evil Foe promised already in Paradise (Gen 3:15) As a result of this deliverance, there is holiness,

a holiness perfect in every detail . . . a holiness not of man's making, but procured by the promised Messiah Another result of this deliverance and its resultant holiness is . . . "The house of Jacob" will possess their possessions . . . "

Laetsch on vv. 19, 20.

"Vv. 19, 20 do not mean to say that every district named shall possess only that territory named in the predicate. We meet here, rather, with a quite common Hebrew idiom. A number of subjects and a corresponding number of predicates are listed, each of the predicates being connected with one of the subjects. In reality all of the subjects are but parts of one body which carries out the work described by the predicates. Israel, God's people shall again possess or take possession of the various districts and countries named, so that the land occupied by them shall exceed by far the territory they possessed in the days of Obadiah.

When and how were the promises of vv. 19, 20 fulfilled? We need not resort to guesswork . . . Matthew and Mark tell us that people from Jerusalem, Judea, Galilee, from beyond Jordan, Decapolis, Idumaea, Tyre and Sidon were gained for Christ's kingdom by Christ's preaching. The Book of Acts records the fulfillment of Obad. 17-20; the conquest of the countries and districts named by Obadiah by the Church of the New Testament, the true Mount Zion: Philistia (Obad 19), Acts 8:40; 9:32-34; Samaria (v. 19), Acts 8:5-17; Zarephath in Phoenicia (v. 20), Acts 11:19; Sepharad (v. 20), in Asia Minor, Rev. 3:1, and Paul's activity. Paul was a Benjamite, and Benjamin is named as possessing Gilead, at Paul's time having a mixed population of Jews and Gentiles, representative of conditions under which Paul labored in the world at large."

Laetsch on vs. 21.

"But what about Edom? Are they hopelessly doomed to eternal damnation? No! Obadiah had spoken stern words of judgment against the relentless enemies of God's people. Yet he closes his prophecy with a glorious promise . . . deliverers will be sent to Edom . . . Gratitude for their own salvation will prompt the delivered children of God to ascend Mount Zion and proclaim salvation to Edom, their enemy and oppressor . . . Edom is a type and symbol of the grace of God evidenced in the preaching of the Gospel of salvation unto all people Thus by the faithful cooperation of the members of God's Church, be they clergy or laymen, the Kingdom shall be the LORD'S . . . The Hebrew perfect 'shall be' denotes an established fact. Jehovah is and remains King Supreme in His kingdom of power governing the affairs of the world, in His kingdom of grace ruling, blessing, extending, protecting His Church and all its individual members, and leading them finally into His kingdom of glory (Rev 21 and 22). In spite of all opposition of the forces of hell (Ps 2:1-3),

Jehovah is and remains King of Kings and Lord of Lords! In time and eternity Jehovah's is the Kingdom!

2. OTHERS SUGGEST THAT THESE VERSES ARE TO BE UNDERSTOOD AS A PREDICTION OF THE RETURN OF ISRAEL TO HER POSSESSION, THAT IS, TO HER LAND, AND THE JUDGMENT OF EDOM AS A NATION.

If this is so, the question then is: has it been fulfilled, or is it yet to be fulfilled?

- A. J. B. Payne and G. Ch. Aalders understand the prophecy to have been fulfilled for the most part in the inter-testament period.

Aalders p. 47ff

Vs. 17b - Israel will repossess the land from which she had been driven

Vs. 18 - the destruction to be brought on Edom by returned Israel

Vs. 19 - occupation of various areas

Vs. 20 - repetition of vs. 17b

Payne p. 419ff.

Vs. 17 - fulfillment in return from the Babylonian exile in 537 B.C.

In Mount Zion will be a holy place = the temple rededicated in 515 B.C. (Ezra 6:15-16).

Vs. 18a - House of Jacob and house of Joseph are to return - fulfillment in return from exile - representatives of all 12 tribes were present in 515 and later, Ezra 6:17; 8:35.

Vs. 18b-21a - These conquests were accomplished in the second century BC when northern Judah and Benjamin were the nucleus from which the Jews under the Maccabees pressed out into the areas indicated by the verses. See Payne for details. The saviours (מְרַשְׁעִים) are human, not Messianic - Judas and his nephew John Hyrcanus (cf. Neh. 9:27 of judges, the only other occurrence of Hiphil Part.).

Vs. 21b - the kingdom shall be Yahweh's - fulfillment - future Messianic kingdom.

Question (JRV): Why not take 21b in the less absolute sense? That is, in the action of the *saviors* (the Maccabees) God's sovereignty is being displayed.

Aalders adds to his comments (p. 15)

"We must take into consideration the matter of *typology*, and then we see in the relationship of Edom to Israel, the relationship of the

world to the church of Christ. Just as here a strong judgment is pronounced on Edom for its animosity toward Jacob, so also the world will undergo God's judgment for its animosity toward the church, and like restored Israel shall triumph over Edom, so shall the church triumph over all who were opposed to her . . . Esau was, just as Jacob, a son of Isaac and a grandson of Abraham, but the Edomites were the bitter enemies of Israel. So also in the new economy there are those born in the family of the church who later become her most bitter enemies. But God will cause the church to triumph over such enemies. . . ."

B. Others, see the prophecy as yet to be fulfilled.

Gabelein

Vs. 17b - restoration of Israel to the land. Not yet fulfilled.

Vs. 18 - Fulfilled by Judas Maccabeus and John Hyrcanus.

Vss. 19,20 - "One might write over these two verses this heading in large letters; 'The Final Reapportionment of the Land' . . . How are these two verses to be taken? Are we to agree with those who seek their fulfillment in the past? Or, like many others are we to give up any attempt to take them as meaning what they say and simply spiritualize these geographical details into a vague prediction of the dominion of the church? Or, finally, do we have here a brief outline of God's ultimate solution of the Palestinian problem during the millennium? Surely this last alternative is best, for read in this way the verses are consistent with the course of O.T. prophecy as a whole . . ."

After discussion of details with little conclusion Gabelein says: "Whatever the true solution of these difficulties, we may be certain that these details are all known to God. He has not forgotten His dispersed people. His covenants with them are enduring. And one day, when the Messiah will occupy the throne of David, the tangled skein of these predicitions will be unraveled. . . ."

Vs. 21 - Saviors. " . . . in the restricted historic sense of his prophecy Obadiah is looking forward to such human deliverers as Zerubbabel and Judas Maccabeus. But these 'saviors' are at best foreshadowings of *the* Savior, who was yet to come in Obadiah's day and whose second and glorious appearing we are now awaiting . . . this prophet . . . dealing only with an age long enmity and with a threatened judgment, is impelled by the prophetic spirit, and sees

'saviors' climbing mount Zion. It is hardly relevant to ask what he meant; but what he *saw* was the Saviour of the world, the Saviour who is Judge, the Saviour of whom it is said by the latest of Biblical prophets, 'the kingdoms of the world are become the kingdoms of the Lord and of His Christ.' Scientific exegesis sees nothing of this sort in these words; but we may venture to say it is there."

See, New Scofield Reference Bible, p. 940, Note 2 (vs. 18). Edom will be revived in the latter days.

Obadiah is a remarkable prophetic book that deserves much more attention than it normally receives. Paul R. Raabe captures its significance in the first paragraph to his Anchor Bible Commentary on Obadiah (1996. p. 3).

"The book of Obadiah is the smallest book in the Hebrew Bible, or the Old Testament. With only one chapter of 21 verses it can easily be overlooked by readers of the Bible. After all, what are 21 verses compared to, say, the 1,364 (MT) of Jeremiah? Yet close study of Obadiah is worth the effort. For one thing, its small size proves to be advantageous. Readers can hold in the mind and memorize the whole book without too much difficulty. This enables them to see the entire forest without getting lost among the trees, something that cannot be done so easily with a large book. Furthermore, Obadiah flows in the mainstream of the Israelite prophetic tradition, a characteristic that has not always been recognized. This short book elegantly summarizes many of the great prophetic themes, such as divine judgment against Israel's enemies, the day of Yahweh, the *lex talionis* as the standard of judgment, the cup-of-wrath metaphor, Zion theology, Israel's possession of the land, and the kingship of Yahweh. Thereby the book serves as a concise epitome for much of the message of the prophets. It also illustrates the nature of prophetic discourse: its poetry and prose; its types of speech, such as judgment, accusation, warning, and promise; and its rhetorical style. It especially exemplifies oracles against the foreign nations, a category that occupies much of the corpus of the Latter Prophets. Therefore attention to the little book of Obadiah should prove to be a rewarding experience for serious students of the bible."

In Obadiah we are also given a remarkable view into the future in the short span of 21 verses (see, Payne, 418, 419).

Among its significant prophecies:

1. Judgment of Edom, vss. 1-9
2. Destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. (although not mentioned by name), vss. 12-14; and scattering of Israel and Judah intimated in vs. 20.
3. The return of Israelites from exile and dominion extended over Edom during Maccabean time (vv 17-21).
4. Perhaps, the establishment of the future Messianic kingdom of Yahweh (vs. 21).