

Obadiah



God's Hope When Life Falls Apart

Consider

Comprehend

Connect

A 3 C's Contemplative Study
By Dr. Jack M. Jacob

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All Scriptures quoted, partially quoted, or adapted from the New American Standard Version of the Holy Bible with 1995 Update.

Introduction to the Book of Obadiah

Author: The book of Obadiah gives us no clues as to the identity of the author other than giving us his proper name: Obadiah. The name itself simply means “servant or worshipper of God”. The reason this does not give us much help in identifying the author is that there are 20 people named Obadiah throughout the Old Testament.

Some have tried to identify the author as the Obadiah mentioned in 1 Kings 18. In this account, Obadiah was a servant of King Ahab. He saved 100 prophets during the time when Jezebel was trying to destroy all that stood for God. While it may be tempting to associate the two, this is not viable for many reasons.

First, the writer of the book could not have been this Obadiah because the account does not mention Obadiah as a prophet. If he had been, he would have also been in danger of destruction. Second, the writer of the book seems to have intimate knowledge of the destruction of Jerusalem and the reaction of the Edomites during this event. There was no destruction of Jerusalem, on this scale, during the time of Ahab. Third, the writer of the book of Obadiah tells of the destruction of Edom as if it is at hand. Edom was destroyed in 583 BC, by Nebuchadnezzar. To put this hundreds of years in the future takes away from the urgency of the warning and takes away the hope the book offers to the Israelites.

Having considered all of the facts, it stands to reason that the book of Obadiah was either someone that was very familiar to most Israelites, and did not need to be further identified, or the message was more important than the person. In either case, we simply are not able to identify the author with any specificity.

Date: To establish the date of the writing of the book of Obadiah, we must revisit some of the same information contained above under consideration of the author. There are two main schools of thought concerning the date for the writing of the book, but we will show that one alternative far outweighs the other.

The first option for the date of the writing of Obadiah puts it in 846 BC just after the Arab-Philistine invasion described in 2 Chronicles 21:16-17. There are a number of reasons this date is weak, but let's consider its merits. First, there was an invasion of Jerusalem in which the Philistines and Arabs sacked Jerusalem and took the king's possessions, family and wives. This would be a serious blow to the security of Jerusalem. Also, Edom did not come to their aid when the attack came.

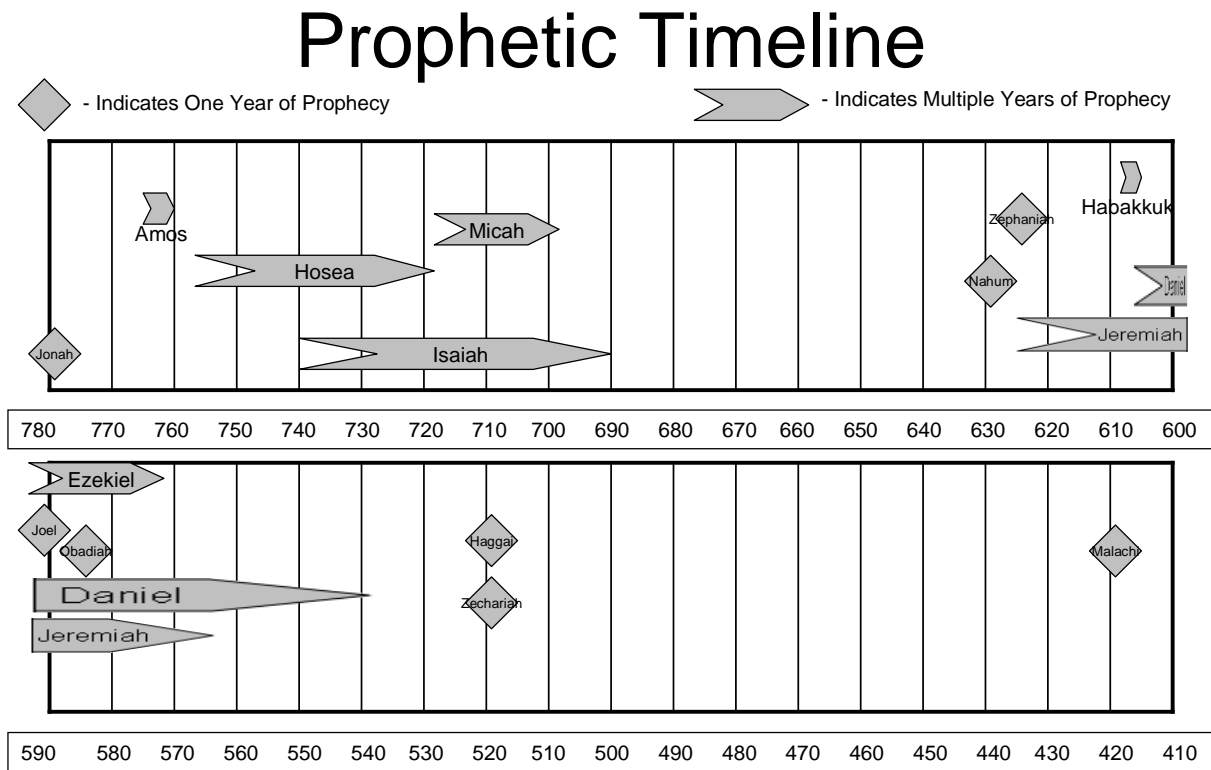
While there are some merits to the argument that Obadiah is describing this attack, there are far more weaknesses. First, the attack by Philistia did not destroy Jerusalem on the scale that Obadiah seems to describe. Second, the people would not have found themselves decimated to the point God would send them encouragement in the form of this prophecy. Third, as mentioned above, Edom was destroyed in 583 BC and this would be too far into the future

to provide any hope. Lastly, the similarity between Obadiah and parallel warnings in Jeremiah, Ezekiel and even Amos seem to suggest that the time is drawing close and the details of these prophecies do not match the events of 2 Chronicles 21:16-17.

The other, more attractive, option for dating the book of Obadiah is that he wrote just after the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC and just prior to the destruction of Edom by the same invaders in 583 BC. This answers all of the objections listed as weaknesses of the other option and also helps us to understand the intensity of emotion expressed by Obadiah throughout the prophecy. One other important strength of this option is the historical record of the remnant of Jerusalem going to Egypt in 585 BC, as described by Jeremiah. The text would have been written after the destruction of Jerusalem and before the fall of Edom and the remnant's departure.

Having considered all the information listed above, the date for the writing of Obadiah should fall in 585 BC.

Contemporary Prophets: In order to see the contemporaries of Obadiah, refer to the following chart:



Permission Granted to Duplicate

Having reviewed the chart above, it should be noted that Obadiah was a contemporary of Daniel, Ezekiel and Jeremiah and came on the heels of Joel's prophecy.

Historical Situation: Obadiah speaks to an audience of the survivors of the destruction of Jerusalem. He speaks of the offenses of Edom as though they were common knowledge. In case the offenses of Edom are not common knowledge for you, consider the following examples of Edom's behavior toward Israel:

First, Jacob and Esau were brothers and they never really got along for a variety of reasons. Jacob was predicted to rule over his older twin and this did not go over so well. (See Genesis 25:23) In addition, Jacob had made Esau trade his birthright for a bowl of soup (see Genesis 25:29-34). Also, Jacob tricked Isaac, their father, into giving him the blessing of the family instead of Esau, his brother (see Genesis 27). This all combined to leave Esau bitter and caused a rift in their relationship. Jacob ran away and went to live with his uncle Laban.

This dissention between Jacob and Esau continued long after the two men had died. In Numbers 20:14-21, the Israelites, the descendants of Jacob, wanted to pass through Edom on their way out of the land of Egypt and on their way to the Promised Land. The Edomites, the descendants of Esau, refused to let the Israelites travel through their land and this caused yet another problem between the two groups. Saul fought against them (1 Samuel 14:47) and the relationship continued to deteriorate until David fought against, and defeated, the Edomites in the Valley of Salt (2 Samuel 8:13-14). Joab fought Edom (1 Kings 11:24-25) and conquered them and they served Israel as vassals (1 Kings 22:47). Edom revolted (2 Kings 8:20-22) and later some Israelites fled to Edom for safety where they were not treated well (Jeremiah 40:11). Even in the Psalms, the people wanted God to seek revenge on Edom for their actions (Ps 137:7).

Obadiah describes how much further than even these events the relationship would spiral downward.

Main Focus: Many authors have undertaken to show the main focus of this, the shortest book of the Bible, to be the punishment of Edom. When one considers the audience and the message, it is rather a word of encouragement and hope to a people that have been decimated. God is reassuring them with a message to help them keep going and the message is that God knows what is going on and will come to their defense and their aid.

Outline of the Book of Obadiah

- I. God's Judgment on Edom (Verses 1-9)
- II. God's Evidence Against Edom (Verses 10-14)
- III. God's Deliverance of Israel (Verses 15-21)

Personal Word: As you approach the study of the book of Obadiah, it is tempting to think that the shortest book of the Bible is both too short to be of value and also too narrow to apply to your life today. Neither of these statements is true. Remember! God said, "All scripture is inspired by God and

profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” 2 Timothy 3:16-17

In this short book we see several truths including:

- God knows what our enemies are doing.
- When we sin, God still loves us and stands ready to defend and reclaim us.
- God will punish sin.
- God stands ready to forgive.

All of these and more truths are packed into this little book. And besides, God has shown time and time again that He can do amazing things with little people and little things. Just think of David and Goliath, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego, the boy with the five loaves of bread and two fishes, and a Baby in a manger!

May God bless you largely as you study this little book.

Dr. Jack M. Jacob

Map of Obadiah's World



¹ Crossway Bibles. *The ESV Study Bible*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008.

Reading Record for Obadiah

Chapter 1

Record Your Observations Below:

Lesson One: Hello! Is Anyone Home? Obadiah 1-21



There is something special about coming home for the first time from college. You anticipate the break with fondness as you return from the rigors of academic life to the simple life you left behind. That is, until you actually get home and find out that none of your friends came home that weekend, your family has converted your bedroom into an office, a workout room, or a kennel for the dog and no one is even there to greet you! Your anticipated return to the smells of bread baking (Hey! It's my fantasy. Allow me to indulge!) only produces disappointment as there is a note on the door telling you to look under the flowerpot for some money your parents left so you can grab a bite to eat at the local pizza joint. In those first few minutes, you just want to say, "Hello! Is anyone home?"

Now imagine that same scenario, except this time the parents are God and you have not returned from college, but from burying your loved ones. You have just survived the most terrible invasion and destruction Jerusalem has ever experienced. You prayed, but it did no good. You went to the temple and most of the priests seemed more interested in packing up their belongings than in presenting your prayers before God. As you stare out over the war-ravaged land and smell the scent of burnt flesh, you notice there is nothing but death all around you. "This is not how it was supposed to be!" You say to yourself. "I thought we were Your chosen people!" "Hello! Is anyone home?"

How about you? Have you ever experienced a time in your life when it seemed that life was falling apart and heaven was silent? In this lesson, listen for encouragement as God reaches down into the lives of those who had done Him wrong, but were still being offered hope in the future.

Describe a time when you felt that God was silent in response to your prayers.

What did it feel like to pray and sense that no one was home?

What did you learn in the process?

Consider It

1. Who is the prophecy concerning? (Verse 1)

2. What were they leaning on for their protection? (Verse 2-9)

3. List some words or phrases that describe how severe God's punishment would be. (Verse 2-9)

4. Who was God going to use to deliver this judgment? (Verse 2-9)

5. What specific group of people did God promise to destroy? (Verse 2-9)

6. How would the soldiers respond to God's judgment? (Verse 2-9)

7. What specific transgressions did God promise to punish Edom for in these verses?
 - a. Verse 10

 - b. Verse 11

 - c. Verse 12

 - d. Verse 13

- e. Verse 14
8. What did God say was the reason for the severity of His judgment? (15-16)
 9. What did God say would be the ultimate result of Edom's punishment? (15-16)
 10. How did God promise to deliver Israel? (17-21)
 11. What other nations did God include as He promised judgment? (17-21)
 12. From where did God promise to return exiles? (17-21)
 13. Whom did God promise to use as Edom's judges? (17-21)
 14. What would be the result for Israel? (17-21)

Comprehend It

1. Notice the tenses of the verbs in God's initial announcement of judgment against Edom. What significance is there to the fact that God said He would make Edom small, but that they were already greatly despised?
2. Why did Edom think they were unconquerable?

3. Who else thought that?
4. What happened to them?
5. What did God mean when He asked, “would they (robbers) not steal only until they had enough”?
6. Why did God choose to use Edom’s allies to judge them?
7. Why did God destroy the wise men before the soldiers?
8. Which was worse for Edom: to stand by and let Jerusalem be destroyed or to ransack it later? Why?
9. When God announced judgment on various nations in other books of the Bible, what was He trying to communicate?
10. Does that apply here? Why or why not?
11. Given the historical situation of the Israelites, why did they need the hope God offered at the end of the prophecy?
12. What effect would the final promise of verse 21 have had on the remnant?

Connect It

1. When you watch the news, do you ever wonder if God is paying attention? Why or why not?
2. Have you ever experienced a time when God seemed silent?
3. Based on this book of the Bible, what MIGHT have been a reason?
4. How did you react to God during this time?
5. What did you do?
6. Have you ever been through a time in your life when you felt like God had judged you for your sin? If so, describe it.
7. How did you react to God then?
8. Do you find God's judgment too severe on Edom? Why or why not?
9. What reason did God give for their judgment in verse 15?
10. Have you ever been going through a difficult time, but still sensed God's activity in your life? If so, describe it.

11. Based on the times you have listed in this lesson, how would you anticipate Israel reacting to this prophecy?

12. Is there any attitude or action that needs to change in your life as a result of studying this book of the Bible?

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