

# 1. Obadiah 840s B.C.

The book of Obadiah has only one chapter and is the shortest book (fewest verses) in the Bible. It is a Gentile prophecy book.

## Date and Occasion for the Book

The date of Obadiah has been discussed and debated more than any of the minor prophets. Clearly, it was written after a significant attack on Jerusalem, where the Edomites rejoiced in, if not participated in, Jerusalem's destruction (verse 11). There are two invasions that are a likely the context for the book.

The first invasion is the attack by the Philistines and Arabians during the reign of Jehoram (848–841 B.C. cataloged in 2 Chronicles 21:16-17). The second invasion is the more devastating invasion by Babylon, which began in 605 and culminated with the destruction of Jerusalem and Solomon's temple in 586 (2 Kings 24–25). If that is the occasion, then Obadiah was written around 586 B.C. But if the 840s date is correct, then Obadiah's one chapter treatise is the earliest of the writing prophets.

We must conclude there is not enough information to be dogmatic about the date of Obadiah. I favor the earlier date because it seems that Obadiah 1-9 was quoted in Jeremiah 49:14-16. It could be vice versa or from a common source. But it seems unlikely that Obadiah would quote Jeremiah at nearly the same time, and there is no evidence of a common source. Also, the commands Obadiah gives the Edomites are about what they should not do to Jerusalem. But if Obadiah were written after Jeremiah, the destruction would already have happened, and these specific commands (such as, *do not enter their gates...do not loot their wealth*) would seem to have no meaning, since the gates would likely already be destroyed and the wealth already carried off to Babylon (2 Kings 20:17; 2 Chronicles 36:7, 10).

## Author

Nothing is known of the author except what is in the book and that Obadiah's name means "worshipper of Yahweh."

## Background

The conflict between Israel and Edom began with a struggle between Jacob and Esau in the womb of their mother Rebekah (Genesis 25:21-26). Esau's descendants were known as the Edomites, who destroyed the Horites and moved to the area south and east of the Dead Sea (Deuteronomy 2:12, 22). When the Israelites under Moses were on their way to the Promised Land, Edom refused to let them pass through (Numbers 20:14-21). But God told Israel, *You shall not detest an Edomite for he is your brother* (Deuteronomy 23:7). Nonetheless, the struggle between Israel and Edom continued through the centuries. Herod the Great, king of Judea from 37 B.C. to 4 B.C., was an Edomite, who tried to have the baby Jesus killed. The Edomites (also called Idumeans) joined the Jews in rebellion against Rome in A.D. 70 but were almost obliterated by the Roman Emperor Titus. The Edomites then faded from history.



## Key Verse, Obadiah 15

*For the day of the Lord draws near on all the nations (or all people, Hebrew *goyim*, the word also used for Gentiles, outsiders, heathen (KJV)]. As you have done, it will be done to you.*

## Message

The message of Obadiah is one of severe judgment. Although it is not quoted in the New Testament, it contains a powerful message about the justice of God. His righteousness demanded vengeance on Edom, the enemy of Israel. Judgment against Edom is mentioned in more Old Testament books than it is against any other foreign nation (cf. Isaiah 11:14; 34:5-17; 63:1-6; Jeremiah 9:25-26; 25:17-26; 49:7-22; Lamentations 4:21-22; Ezekiel 25:12-14; 35; Joel 3:19; Amos 1:11-12; 9:11-12; Obadiah; Malachi 1:4). And if the early date is correct, all that began with Obadiah.

## Purpose

To predict, in the hearing of Israel, God's judgment on Edom

## Theme

Subject: Those who attempt to destroy God's people

Complement: will be destroyed by God

## Commentary

### Obadiah 1:1, God's Revelation Is in Words

**Verse 1** tells us that Obadiah received a vision from the Lord God (*Adoni Yahweh*) which came in words, *Thus says the Lord*. Revelation from God in the Bible was always in words, never in feelings, inclinations, or mental telepathy. When Obadiah wrote it down, it was via inspiration, every word accurately recorded (2 Peter 1:20-21). But in verse 1, Obadiah also tells us about another work of God. He said, *an envoy has been sent among the nations*. The point is that God was motivating the nations to come against Edom, as if He sent an envoy to tell them that. So God gave prophets revelation in words, and motivated nations without words. These nations would come against Edom, without their knowing it was God who was motivating them to do it. God dealt with other nations (verse 15), but the focus of the Old Testament prophets was on those who were involved with Israel.

An Application: God manipulates nations to do His bidding, but individual believers get direction from the inspired Word of God.

### Obadiah 1:2-4, The Basic Sin Is Pride

In **verses 2-3**, God told Edom that the basic reason you are *despised* is because *the arrogance of your heart has deceived you*.

Edom was situated in a narrow ridge of mountainous land southeast of the Dead Sea, also known as Petra. It was “inaccessible” because of the gorges radiating from it towards the west and the desert on the east. So Edom had a false sense of security because of their geographic location. Their people are those

*Who say in your heart, “Who will bring me down to earth?”*



*Arrogance* in verse 3 is the basic word for *pride*, the fundamental root of all sin. Pride is the idea of value independent from God, the basis of Satan’s message to Eve (Genesis 3:1-5).

An Application: When the world sees itself as having independent value, for example, through what it calls science, evolution, or progressive morality, it will be accompanied by a heart of deception.

**Verse 4** uses a hyperbolic expression about Petra to state God’s inescapable judgment—*though you set your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down.*

### Obadiah 1:5-9, The Judgment of God Is Comprehensive

**Verses 5-6** say that robbers only take what they want, and grape gatherers leave gleanings, but with God’s judgment, *Esau will be ransacked, and his hidden treasure searched out.*

**Verse 7** says Edom will be betrayed by its allies. *They will set an ambush for you.*

**Verses 8-9** (and the comment at the end of verse 7) tell us that Edom will not be saved by its wise men, its warriors, or its mountains. God will ...*Destroy wise men from Edom And understanding from the mountain of Esau.*

### Obadiah 1:10-14, Don’t Take Advantage of Someone’s Misfortune

**Verses 10-12** condemn Edom for being indifferent to the attacks against Israel. From God’s perspective, because of Edom’s indifference (they *stood aloof* and literally *looked on*), Edom was no different than the strangers who went against the Jews.

**Verses 13-14** extend Edom’s condemnation by warnings against entering *the gate of My people*, and telling the Edomites: *do not loot their wealth, do not...cut down their fugitives.*

### Obadiah 1:15-21, The Day of the Lord Is a Coming Time of Judgment **Verse 15**

**is the key verse for application** of Obadiah’s prophecy. *For the day of the LORD draws near on all the nations* (or all people, Hebrew *goyim*). Then the basic principle of justice, *As you have done, it will be done to you. Your dealings will return on your own head.* As Jesus said, “*For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return*” (Luke 6:38).

**Verse 16** uses the figure of drinking, common in the Bible for the judgment of God (Isaiah 51:17, 21-23; Jeremiah 25:15-33; Habakkuk 2:16; Revelation 14:9-10; 16:19). The verse adds the idea that this applies to all nations (or all people, Hebrew *goyim*), and the result is that they *become as if they had never existed.*

**Verses 17-18** announce the future restoration of all tribes of Israel. *But on Mount Zion [Jerusalem] there will be those [Jewish people] who escape...then the house of Jacob [Judah, the Southern Kingdom] will be a fire and the house of Joseph [Israel, the Northern Kingdom] a flame*—they will possess all the blessings of the covenants God made with them. But the house of Esau will be *as stubble*.

An Application: God keeps His promises to His people, *for the Lord has spoken* (verse 18).

**Verses 19-20** predict the destruction and occupation of Edom. The prediction is that Israel will possess the territory of Edom in the Negev, the Philistine coastline of the Mediterranean, the central hill country of Ephraim and Samaria, Gilead east of the Jordan River, and as far north as Zarephath, between Tyre and Sidon.

**Verse 21** probably refers to the dominance of Israel and those who will judge and rule during the future Millennial Kingdom, which will one day be merged into that eternal kingdom over which the Lord Jesus Christ alone will reign in glory (1 Corinthians 15:24-28; Revelation 11:15; 12:10; 22:1-5).

## An Application

### God Will Always Preserve His Own People

- God will judge His own people. But God's people should never judge God's people, in the sense of attempting to carry out punishment, even when they have done evil things. In the church, the body of Christ, it is discipline—yes, judgment—no. Responsibility—yes, authority—no.
- God returns His own people to Himself, not because of their faith, but because of His faithfulness to His own promises. Never underestimate the work of God among His own people. Historically, just about the time the church looked hopeless, God brought an awakening or a revival or renewal of His Word.
- God will also judge the people of the world. It may seem like they are secure in the evil political, moral, ideological community they have established. But just wait, in His own time, God will bring them down to destruction.

As Jesus said,

*“For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return”* (Luke 6:38).