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Introduction to Obadiah

The bizarre story of Nebuchadnezzar shows us how the Lord took Nebuchadnezzar's wits such that he literally lived like an animal for some time (Daniel 4:33-34)! The Bible tells us why this happened!

Daniel 5:20, 21b, “But when his heart was lifted up and his spirit became so proud that he behaved arrogantly, he was deposed from his royal throne, and *his* glory was taken away from him...until he recognized that the Most High God is ruler over the realm of mankind...”

Truly, God will not be mocked! If a person defies the Lord, eventually that person will be crushed.

It is as God said in 1 Peter 5, which essentially is repeated no less than five times in Scripture:¹

1 Peter 5:5b, “...God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

Today we turn in our study to the Book of Obadiah, a very short Old Testament epistle written on account of the pride and prideful actions of the Edomites. It is my plan to introduce you to this wonderful prophecy and its message. We begin with the prophet.

The book is named after the prophet who received the vision (Obadiah 1). Nothing is known for certain about Obadiah. He frequently mentions “Jerusalem,” “Judah,” and “Zion” which suggests that he belonged to the Southern Kingdom (cf. vv. 10-12,17,21). His name² means “servant of the Lord” or “worshipper of the Lord” which reflects that which Obadiah did here. In writing this prophecy, as we shall see, he vindicated the name of the Lord!

It is interesting to note that Obadiah is the shortest book in the Old Testament. The back story, is to understanding this book is to understand the history of the Edomites.

The Edomites trace their origin to Esau. You will recall that he was the firstborn (twin) son of Isaac and Rebekah (Genesis 25:24-26). His name means “hairy,” because when he was born “he was like a hairy garment all over” (Genesis 25:25). In fact, later when Jacob deceived his father, Jacob had to wear lamb’s wool on his hands (which in the Bible included the forearm) to make his father believe he was Esau!³ Esau obviously was a “hairy” individual!

He also is called Edom, meaning “red,” on account of his love for “red stew” which cost him his birthright (Genesis 25:30). As you know, Esau had a twin brother named Jacob (which means “one who supplants” because when he was born, his hand was grasping on to his older brother, Esau, as if he was trying to be born first, Genesis 25:26!). And yet even before this their relationship seemed to be doomed. Speaking of Jacob and Esau in the womb, Moses recorded the following for us:

Genesis 25:22-23, “But the children struggled together within her; and she said, ‘If it is so, why then am I *this way*?’ So she went to inquire of the Lord. And the Lord said to her, ‘Two nations are in your womb; and two peoples shall be separated from your

Prophetic Overview

1. Joel to Judah ~845 BC.
2. Jonah on account of Nineveh ~780 BC.
3. Amos to Israel ~765 BC.
4. Hosea to Israel ~750 BC.
5. Isaiah to Judah ~740 BC.
6. Micah to Judah ~735 BC.
7. Nahum to Judah ~650 BC.
8. Jeremiah to Judah ~627 BC.
9. Zephaniah to Judah ~622 BC.
10. Habakkuk to Judah ~605 BC.
11. Daniel to Judah ~605 BC.
12. Ezekiel to Judah ~593 BC.

body; and one people shall be stronger than the other; and the older shall serve the younger.”

It is this struggle that serves at the back story to Obadiah!

Most of you know of the two incidents in Jacob and Esau’s life where (a) Jacob tricked Esau out of the latter’s birthright (Genesis 25:27), and (b) Jacob deceived his father and received the blessing that should have gone to Esau (Genesis 27:38-40).

Now having stolen Esau’s blessing, Jacob fled to Haran where he stayed for twenty years⁴ enjoying God’s blessing (he was God’s choice through whom the Lord would fulfill His Covenant promises, Genesis 25:23).

Twenty years later when Jacob returned to his home with four wives, a quiver full of children, slaves, animals, and much wealth, Esau graciously received him. However the bitterness on account of what Jacob had done would remain with Esau’s children. After welcoming Jacob back to the Promised Land, Esau settled in a region of mostly rugged mountains south of the Dead Sea⁵ called Edom (Gr., “Idumea”). The area is forty miles wide and one hundred miles long stretching from the Gulf of Aqabah up to the Dead Sea. Though dry and desolate in many regards, nevertheless it was of strategic importance as the King’s Highway ran right through the country (cf. Numbers 20:17). It also housed the famous city of Petra which we’ll talk about some other time.



Jacob and Esau’s descendants, Israel and Edom, were perpetual enemies. When Israel came out from Egypt, Edom denied their brother Jacob passage through their land, located south of the Dead Sea (Numbers 20:14-21; Judges 11:17-18). Why? Because they could!

This enmity resulted in regular conflict between these two nations during the Kingdom Years.⁶ However, much of the physical attacks ENDED in 734 BC when Edom became a vassal kingdom of Assyria and then later Babylon. This didn’t mean their hatred for God’s people ended. However they now were under the direction of these two kingdoms which meant they were not free to attack Judah any time they desired- which brings us to the last straw.

When the Babylonians crushed Judah in 586 BC, destroying the nation and taking most of the population into exile, Edom could NOT have been happier OR more cruel! Though Judah was Edom's brother such that Edom should have helped them, Edom did just the opposite.

Obadiah 10-11a, "Because of violence to your brother Jacob, you will be covered *with* shame, and you will be cut off forever. On the day that you stood aloof [literally, they stood high, far off, removed]..."

Amazing! When God's people were at their lowest, Edom did NOT defend them, NOR did they pity them... not even in the slightest! Their initial response was to stand afar off, watching! But this didn't last long.

Obadiah 11b, "...on the day that strangers carried off his wealth, and foreigners entered his gate and cast lots for Jerusalem- you too were as one of them."

To be "as one of them" indicates that though Edom did NOT cast lots for Jerusalem,⁷ nevertheless it is as if they did. As Jerusalem was conquered and its inhabitants murdered, raped, tortured, or placed in chains, Edom sat back and watched with glee!⁸ In fact, recall the words of the Psalmist:

Psalms 137:7, "Remember, O Lord, against the sons of Edom the day of Jerusalem, who said, 'Raze it, raze it, to its very foundation.'"

You say, "*What else would be expected? They were enemies!*" In actuality we would expect a whole lot more! Edom's heritage meant that at one time (if not at this time) they knew better. They knew of the Covenant Promises of the Lord which bound God to the people of Jacob. Accordingly, they knew that to attack Judah was to attack God! Do you remember when Saul was breathing threats against the church, what Christ said?

Acts 9:4b, "...Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"

Because Edom rejoiced in the day of Judah's despair, not to mention also actively being involved (as we'll see), speaks of the treachery and wickedness of this people. The text continues.

Obadiah 12-13a, "Do not gloat over your brother's day, the day of his misfortune. And do not rejoice over the sons of Judah in the day of their destruction; yes, do not boast in the day of *their* distress [lit. do not open your big mouth...]. Do not enter the gate of My people in the day of their disaster. Yes, you, do not gloat over their calamity in the day of their disaster..."-

On top of their rejoicing, the indication here is that as God's people were being ravished, Edom mocked those being attacked, making fun of them — the way they screamed, the way they suffered, the way they ran for their lives, and the way they died! L. C. Allen described it thiw

way:

Stunned into unbearable grief, the prophet's melancholy is disturbed by the memory of the shocking blatancy of the Edomites who gathered like so many greedy vultures around the scene of doom. He tries in vain to shut out from his ears these voices which haunt him with the echo of malicious chuckles and jeers. He screams at them to keep their big mouths shut. How dare they add their supercilious insults to the injuries of body, mind, and spirit already inflicted upon the people of Judah? (Allen, 1976, p. 157)

Obadiah 13b, "...And do not loot their wealth in the day of their disaster."

As we might expect, Edom's disdain for Israel eventually transformed into active harm! It began with many Edomites "looting" Israel!⁹ But that even was NOT the depths of their vile action.

Obadiah 14, "And do not stand at the fork of the road to cut down their fugitives; and do not imprison their survivors in the day of their distress."

During the devastation of Babylon's destruction of Jerusalem, there were Jewish survivors who escaped. Those that went south were greeted by their Edomite brethren. But rather than help their brethren, the Edomites killed some and cullied the rest, sending them back to their Babylonian captors! Because of all of this, the doom of the Edomites was sealed.

Obadiah 15, "For the day of the Lord draws near on all the nations. As you have done, it will be done to you. Your dealings will return on your own head."

And that is exactly what happened! After 586 BC, Edom was decimated as a nation, for they too were taken into exile. The remnant were attacked by the Arabs as the Nabatean kingdom expanded into the east side of the Transjordan at this time. The remnant of Edom fled and settled on the south side of Judah in the wilderness where they remained until 70 AD when they were completely and finally wiped out, in accordance with the promise God made here in Obadiah 15!

The Theme

From all of this we conclude that the book of Obadiah was written to announce God's plan to destroy Edom on account of their treachery! As such, the prophecy served both to:

- Rebuke the Edomites on account of their treacherous response to Judah when Jerusalem was destroyed.
- Warn the Edomites that the day of their doom also was coming!

The Dating of this Prophecy

Based on everything we've seen thus far, most date this prophecy around 586 BC¹⁰- that time when Judah went into exile!¹¹

Key Messages, Select.¹²

One of the key messages of Obadiah is God's answer to the paralysis of worry/concern , Obadiah 1-4 (cf. Jeremiah 49:14-16) And an important connection to understanding Obadiah is found in the connection between Obadiah 1-4 & Jeremiah 49:14-16. At this point, I am NOT going to read Obadiah 1-4; instead, I want you to read it as I read Jeremiah 49:14-16.

Eighteen years prior to the writing of Obadiah, Jeremiah recorded a prophecy of judgment against the nations which included a section against Edom. With your eyes on Obadiah 1, listen to Jeremiah, speaking of Edom:

Jeremiah 49:14-16, "[Look at Obadiah 1a] I have heard a message from the Lord [now Obadiah 1b] and an envoy is sent among the nations, *saying*, [Obadiah 1c] 'Gather yourselves together and come against her, and rise up for battle! [Obadiah 2] For behold, I have made you small among the nations, despised among men. [Obadiah 3] As for the terror of you, the arrogance of your heart has deceived you, O you who live in the clefts of the rock, who occupy the height of the hill. [Obadiah 4] Though you make your nest as high as an eagle's, I will bring you down from there,' declares the Lord."

There is no question, Obadiah opened his prophecy using the words of Jeremiah 49:14-16. As the words of Jeremiah were a comfort to Obadiah, Obadiah deigned to start his prophetic work with the very same words. Accordingly, to determine the encouragement found in Jeremiah is to uncover that which prompted the opening words of Obadiah. Toward that end, turn back with me to Jeremiah 45 which is the beginning of a series of prophecies of judgment against the nations surrounding Judah (Jeremiah 45-51).

Note the impetus for this message, the announcement of God's judgment against Edom: Baruch's excessive worry.

Jeremiah 45:1-3, "*This is* the message which Jeremiah the prophet spoke to Baruch the son of Neriah, when he had written down these words in a book at Jeremiah's dictation, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah [~604 BC], saying: 'Thus says the Lord the God of Israel to you, O Baruch: You said, "Ah, woe is me! For the Lord has added sorrow to my pain; I am weary with my groaning and have found no rest.'"

Recall, Jeremiah was not allowed to marry. However it was NOT God's intention to leave him bereft of support and encouragement, so the Lord raised up a faithful servant who would minister to Jeremiah, his name was Baruch.

Baruch came from a family of some influence in Jerusalem. However, he faithfully served alongside Jeremiah throughout the prophet's ministry serving as an attendant, a spokesman, a co-sufferer, a companion, and finally a scribe (which means, Baruch recorded the contents of Jeremiah as the prophet dictated it to him).

Now we know that the ministry God gave to Jeremiah took a huge toll on the prophet. In fact, Jeremiah is known as *"the weeping prophet"*- so moved was he at times! Yet to record these prophecies from the mouth of Jeremiah, knowing that they would have a massive impact upon your family, loved ones, home, and nation, would not have been an easy thing. And here we see the toll it placed on Baruch. Consider Baruch's response:

Jeremiah 45:3, "Ah, woe is me! For the Lord has added sorrow to my pain; I am weary with my groaning and have found no rest."

So Baruch is burdened on account of the many prophecies of doom that he had recorded which were all directed against God's people. In response, God sent Jeremiah to minister to Baruch with the words of Jeremiah 46-51 which you may recall is "The Nation's Section" in which God details His judgments against the nations surrounding Judah.

The message is quite straight forward, *"Yes, God is going to discipline His people, and that discipline is NOT going to be easy. YET in comparison to that which awaits Judah's persecutors, God's people most certainly will have gotten off easy!"* In this regard, consider the initial words of encouragement that God gave Baruch.

God's answer to the paralysis of worry and concern is that God is THE sovereign Lord who is at work in the world.

Jeremiah 45:4, "Thus you are to say to him [Baruch], 'Thus says the Lord [the Sovereign Lord of Creation יהוה (Yhvh)], "Behold, what I have built I am about to tear down, // and what I have planted I am about to uproot, that is, the whole land.'"

The emphasis and focus of this verse is on the fact that everything and anything that you see and know in this world is according to God's sovereign will. As that is the case, it is God's prerogative as to what He does with what He's made..

- God establishes nations, not man.
- God raises up families.
- God ordains marriages.
- God ordains jobs.

James 1:17, "Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow."

And though it is natural — like Jonah — to fall in love with that which God has created and raised up, we must ever keep in mind that it is the grace of God that gives us blessing and it is the grace of God that takes these blessings away!

Job understood this, which is why he did NOT respond with anxiety, hostility, or anger when the Lord took almost everything from him.

Job 1:21, "...he said, 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.'"

Unlike Jonah, Job's hands did NOT grasp on to the blessings of God such that when He took them back, there was a fight. Job understood that all that he had was given to him by God and therefore could be taken from him whenever and if ever the Lord so pleased. No doubt inspired by this truth, Samuel Rutherford encouraged a woman in his congregation who lost her daughter to illness with these words:

Remember of what age your daughter was, and that just so long was your lease of her... Good mistress, if ye would not be content that Christ would hold from you the heavenly inheritance which is made yours by His death, shall not that same Christ think hardly of you if ye refuse to give Him your daughter willingly, who is a part of His inheritance and conquest? I pray the Lord to give you all your own, and to grace you with patience to give God His also. He is an ill debtor who payeth that which he hath borrowed with a grudge. (Rutherford, 2015, p. 34)

God's first response to Baruch when he was "worried and bothered about so many things" was to remind him that all that he had was a grace/stewardship from the Lord. If the Lord deigned to take it back, that is according to the good pleasure of God! Secondly notice, the unbiblical desires are the main culprit when it comes to worry.

Jeremiah 45:5a, "'But you, are you seeking great things for yourself? Do not seek *them...*'"

Here in a nut shell was Baruch's problem. While commendably he gave up so much to serve the Lord by serving Jeremiah, nevertheless as a sinner, his motives were mixed, which the case for all of us! Recall the disciples' question which Peter posed:

Matthew 19:27: "Then Peter answered and said to Him, 'Behold, we have left everything and followed You; what then will there be for us?'"

There it is. The issue which so often drives us in ministry, "*What is God going to give me in return?*" This so often this is what lies behind worry/fretting/concern- what is going to happen when it comes to me?

Recognizing this proclivity is key when it comes to combatting worry or oppressive concern. Accordingly, God addressed it head on here. *“Baruch, what great thing are you seeking? Don’t!”* In other words, banish all expectation and desire that is NOT Biblical. This is so important! Our tendency is to set our heart on something. And provided that it is good/honorable, we assume it is a praise-worthy desire in the Kingdom. Now because it is praise-worthy, it doesn’t take long for the desire to become an expectation, something we believe that God Himself would have us seek. Then when God’s providence counters our expectation, we become agitated, burdened, and worried.

God’s response to this is to exhort us NOT to hold unbiblical expectations; entitlements God never promised in His word! That was the call God gave to Baruch. He was from a prosperous family of some means whose brother attained a high ranking in Zedekiah’s administration.¹³ Accordingly, no doubt Baruch thought that by serving Jeremiah, he too would be a man of renown. So God told him here, *“Do not seek great things for yourself!”* And with this, God then encouraged Baruch with a glorious reminder, that our life is protected by God.

Jeremiah 45:5b, *“But you, are you seeking great things for yourself? Do not seek *them*; for behold, I am going to bring disaster on all flesh,’ declares the Lord, ‘BUT I will give your life to you as booty in all the places where you may go.”*

The expression, *“...give your life as booty...”*, is a colloquialism in reference to a soldier who escapes a battle with his life. Now if you think about it, isn’t that what we want from a loved one who is a soldier? Sure, we’d love to hear that they received commendations and promotions. But in the end, none of these are important to us. What is most important to us is that they return home.

That is the glorious assurance God gave Baruch here AND that God gives each of us in Christ. The promise of salvation does NOT include worldly glory or ease of days. HOWEVER it does promise that in the end, we will all be seated at the wedding feast of the Lamb! This was Christ’s word of exhortation to His disciples who in their service of the Lord were overjoyed on account of the things they were able to do.

Luke 10:20, *“Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven.”*

Don’t miss it! Our joy and boast is NOT what we have done, accumulated, or accomplished, BUT simply the fact that God is our Lord and Savior! Accordingly, God exhorted His children in Jeremiah’s day with this encouragement:

Jeremiah 9:24a, *“But let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me...”*

That is what is most important in life... understanding and knowing the Lord! Christ told His

disciples:

Matthew 19:29, “And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name’s sake, shall receive many times as much, and shall [most important of all] inherit eternal life.”

This is the glorious assurance God gives to all His children! No matter what happens in life, in the end they will be saved! Christian, we would be spared a host of grief in this life if our greatest desire was simply to be with Christ when we die! For, don’t miss it, that is what God gives each of us in Christ as a guarantee! How He deigns to use you is NOT specified, BUT your salvation most certainly is!

Such was the initial purpose behind God’s message to the Edomites in the life of Baruch. No doubt that is why this passage was such a comfort to Obadiah and why he wanted to pass it along to us.

Works Cited

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- Rutherford, S. (2015). *Letters of Samuel Rutherford*. Andesite Press.

End Note(s)

- ¹ cf. James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5; Psalms 138:6; Prov. 3:34; Matthew 23:12.
- ² The name Obadiah occurs 20 times in the Old Testament, referring to at least 12 other Old Testament individuals.
- ³ Genesis 27:11-12, 16, 21-22.
- ⁴ cf. Genesis 31:38
- ⁵ cf. Genesis 33:16; 36:8,9; Deuteronomy 2:4,5.
- ⁶ For example, the Edomites opposed Saul (1 Samuel 14:47), were subdued under David (2 Samuel 8:13-14; 1 Kings 11:15-16), and exploited under Solomon (1 Kings 9:26–28)- though not without Edomite opposition (1 Kings 11:14–22). In the ninth century, the Edomites, in an alliance with the Moabites and the Ammonites, raided Judah during Jehoshaphat’s reign (2 Chronicles 20:1–2). Under Jehoram’s regency, Edom successfully rebelled and consequently enjoyed freedom from Israelite domination for about forty years (2 Kings 8:20–22; 2 Chronicles 21:8–10). This freedom did not last long for in Amaziah’s regency, Israel attacked Edom slaughtering many (2 Kings 14:7; 2 Chronicles 25:11–12). Then during the reign of Ahaz, Edom raided Judah, taking many captives (2 Chronicles 28:17). Once again, at this time they enjoyed independency.
- ⁷ cf. Psalms 22:18; Joel 3:3; Nahum 3:10; Matthew 27:35.
- ⁸ cf. Genesis 21:16; 2 Samuel 18:13; 2 Kings 2:7.
- ⁹ 1 Esdras 4:45 blames the Edomites for burning the temple in Jerusalem, but this is unconfirmed (cf. Lamentations 4:21–22).
- ¹⁰ The date of writing of this book is tied to an Edomite assault on Jerusalem as described in vv. 10-14. Obadiah apparently wrote shortly after the attack. Now there were four significant invasions of Jerusalem in Old Testament history: (1) By Shishak, king of Egypt, ca. 925 B.C. during the reign of Rehoboam (1 Kings 14:25, 26; 2 Chronicles 12), (2) By the Philistines and Arabians between 848-841 B.C. during the reign of Jehoram of Judah (2 Chronicles 21:8-20), (3) By Jehoash, king of Israel, ca. 790 B.C. (2

Kin. 14; 2 Chronicles 25), and (4) By Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, in the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Of these four, only the second and the fourth are possible fits with the historical data. And of the two, number four is preferable since, as already referenced, Obadiah's words fit better with the history recorded in Jeremiah and Ezekiel (Lamentations 4:21; Ezekiel 25:12; 35:10). There is an obvious interrelationship between Jeremiah and Obadiah (cf. Obadiah 1-9 and Jeremiah 49:7-22).

¹¹ Though there are two other possible times for the writing of this book (where Edom was strong enough to enter into Jerusalem and plunder it, as in Obadiah 13), the content of Obadiah fits best with the history recorded in Jeremiah and Ezekiel which both address the Babylonian exile of God's people (Lamentations 4:21; Ezekiel 25:12; 35:10).

¹² It is always interesting to me that there is no indication that this prophecy was ever delivered to the Edomites. As such at minimum we understand that God gave this prophecy to His people that they might know that the Lord was not oblivious to the wicked actions of those who opposed His people, but rather would address their sin in His due time! As such, prophetic discourses like this are the Old Testament equivalent of Revelation 10:10, speaking of the record/book of God's judgment against the nations, "And I took the little book out of the angel's hand and ate it, and it was in my mouth sweet as honey; and when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter."

¹³ Cf. J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, NICOT, p. 684.