

Commentary on Obadiah, by Chuck Smith 4.17.24

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March memory verse Ephesians 3:20 (NKJV) Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us,

April memory verse Ephesians 3:21 (NKJV)

to Him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

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Includes John MacArthur :: Bible Introductions - Obadiah

Who Obadiah was, or where he came from, when he prophesied, nobody knows for sure. There have been a lot of guesses as to who Obadiah actually was, but they are all just guesses.

It is amazing how much men can say whenever the Bible is silent on a subject. And it seems to just be a take-off place for guys to develop theories and to write theme papers or doctrinal dissertations on some area where the Bible is silent. But at best, when God's Word is silent, all we can do is offer conjecture, and at best, our conjecture is worthless. So I prefer not to make any conjecture. The Bible is silent; we'll remain silent. All I can tell you is that the name Obadiah means "worshiper of God," or "worshiper of Jehovah," more literally, or Yahweh. And thus, it is a very beautiful name.

Some believe that he prophesied just before Joel, but again, that isn't important. What is important is what he prophesied. And Obadiah directed his prophecy against the Edomites.

Now the Edomites were descendents of Esau the brother of Jacob. And you remember when Jacob, through the advice and counsel of his mother Rebekah, disguised himself and went in and deceived his aged father, receiving the birthright, blessing, from his father Isaac, that Esau hated his brother Jacob and he vowed to kill him. Well, they did patch up their differences in years to come. However, that animosity that seemed to exist between the brothers, Esau and Jacob, did continue on through the years. And the Edomites became the perennial enemies of Israel. They had a very vicious nature that caused them every time Israel had any problem with any enemy, every time that Israel was invaded from either from Egypt or by the Syrians or by the Assyrians, whatever, whenever Israel was pressed in battle, Edom would always attack them also from the south. They took advantage of every situation. And many times when Jerusalem was being overthrown by the Babylonians and all, as the Israelites would seek to flee to Edom, the Edomites would block their borders and turn them back to their enemies, and thus, they were the perennial enemies of Israel, but always taking advantage. So there is that psalm in which the psalmist asked God to take vengeance upon the Edomites

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who, while Jerusalem was being destroyed, encouraged the destroyer saying, "Raze it, raze it."

Obadiah prophesies against the Edomites, and it is because of this perennial attitude of hatred against God's people Israel that God brings Edom into judgment. Edom was once a great kingdom. The people carved great cities out of the cliffs. The city of Petra today is one of the cities of the Edomites. All we have, of course, today are the ruins of Petra, but it testifies of the grandeur of the Edomite Kingdom. These great palaces and all that were carved right out of the rock. Sort of cliff dwellers, but you don't want to think of them in terms of cavemen. When you see these marvelous really dwelling places, palaces and all that were carved right out of the rock there in Petra. They were the Edomites.

So this is the vision of Obadiah. Thus saith the Lord GOD concerning Edom (Oba 1:1);

So the prophecy immediately is directed by God against Edom.

We have heard a rumor from the LORD, and an ambassador is sent among the heathen, Arise ye, and let us go up against her in battle. [So the Lord said concerning Edom,] Behold, I have made thee small among the heathen: thou art greatly despised. The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee, thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock (Oba 1:1-3),

No doubt a reference to Petra and the other cities that the Edomites had carved out of the rocks.

whose habitation is high; that saith in his heart, Who shall bring me down to the ground? (Oba 1:3)

They felt very safe and secure in these cities such as Petra. To get to Petra you have to go back through this narrow canyon that is only wide enough for one horse and a rider to pass through single file, and then you break out sort of into this wider area when you get to Petra. And there these large caves that are dug out of the sandstone rock and it opens up and you see the vastness which was once the great city of Petra. But because of the narrow entry in, dwelling high in the rocks, they felt very secure. They could stop the enemy very easily who tried to make their way up these narrow canyons by just being up on the ledges and tossing rocks down on them. And they dwelt very secure and they felt very secure there within their dwellings. And so God speaks of the pride of their heart as they dwelt in these high cliffs and just felt so secure, saying, "Who shall bring us down to the ground?"

But though thou exalt thyself as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, from there will I bring thee down, saith the LORD. If thieves came to thee, if robbers by night, (how art thou cut off!) would they not have stolen till they had enough? (Oba 1:4-5)

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In other words, they wouldn't completely destroy you. They would take from you, but they would also leave some.

if the grape gatherers came to thee, would they not leave some grapes? How are the things of Esau searched out! how are his hidden things sought up! All the men of thy confederacy have brought thee even to the border: the men that were at peace with thee have deceived thee, and prevailed against thee; they that eat thy bread have laid a wound under thee: there is none understanding in him. Shall I not in that day, saith the LORD, even destroy the wise men out of Edom, and the understanding out of the mount of Esau? And thy mighty men, O Teman, shall be dismayed, to the end that every one of the mount of Esau may be cut off by slaughter (Oba 1:5-9).

So God predicts that though they feel very secure, exalted in their position, that God is going to utterly cut them off, every one of them will be cut off. The question, "Where is thy wise men?" and the mention of Teman.

Now you will remember that when Job had his affliction and his friends came to comfort him, one of the friends that came to comfort Job was Eliphaz the Temanite. Teman was one of the major cities of Edom, and Edom was known for its wise counselors. And, of course, as Eliphaz counsels Job, he expresses the wisdom and the philosophy of the world. And so the Lord makes reference to the understanding of Mount Esau. "And thy mighty men, O Teman, shall be dismayed, to the end that every one of the mount of Esau may be cut off by slaughter." So God predicts the total eradication of the Edomites.

Now do you know any Edomites today? Then God's Word must indeed be true. God did what He said. He cut off all the Edomites. In fact, historically the last of the Edomites was the family of Herod. From there they disappear from history. Herod the Great was from Idumea, or he was an Edomite. At his death his sons reigned in his stead. But with the dynasty of Herod and the end of that dynasty comes historically the end of the Edomites, and they became lost into the other nations at that time. So God's Word was fulfilled, the Edomites had been cut off from being a people.

Now God gives the reason why Edom was to be cut off. At the time that Obadiah prophesied they were a very powerful kingdom, dwelling smugly, filled with pride.

For thy violence against thy brother Jacob (Oba 1:10)

Remember Esau and Jacob were brothers, and so there was a close relationship, and yet their violence against them.

You remember when Moses was bringing the children of Israel out of Egypt to the Promise Land, he came to Edom and the king of Edom came out and met him at the borders, and Moses said, "Look, we would like to pass through your land. We will not eat your bread, nor will we even drink your water. We just want passage through the land." And the king of Edom forbade Moses passage through the land so that Moses

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and the children of Israel meekly turn and circumvented Edom going way out and around. So Edom was the perennial foe to Israel, though in the beginning they were brothers, Jacob and Esau. And so, "For thy violence against thy brother Jacob,"

shame shall cover thee, and thou shalt be cut off for ever. In the day that you stood on the other side, in the day that the strangers carried away captive his forces, and the foreigners entered into his gates, and cast lots upon Jerusalem, even you were as one of them (Oba 1:10-11).

And as I said, they would always take advantage whenever Jerusalem was under a siege by their enemies. Edom would always send their troops up there to join in the battle. Edom was finally conquered by David and became sort of a vassal state for a time, but under Rehoboam, actually, is when the Edomites began to rebel against the kingdom of Israel and then began to join their enemies in every attack.

But thou shouldest not have looked on the day of thy brother in the day that he became a stranger; neither should you have rejoiced over the children of Judah in the day of their destruction; neither should you have spoken proudly in the day of his distress (Oba 1:12).

So this was the sin of Edom, was rejoicing in the judgment of God against the nation of Israel.

Now God, like a father, reserves the right to punish His own children, but don't let anybody else enter in or interfere. And this is exactly the situation. God was chastising His own children, but Edom was there cheering Him. God said, "I don't need any cheering section when I'm chastising My people." And the fact that they were rejoicing in the chastisement of God upon the nation is the very thing that God is using as His indictment against them.

You should not have entered into the gate of my people in the day of their calamity (Oba 1:13);

Edom would enter in and take what spoil they could. They would rip them off every chance they had.

yes, you should not have looked on their affliction in the day of their calamity, nor have laid hands on their substance in the day of their calamity; Neither should you have stood in the crossway, to cut off those that did escape; neither should you have delivered up those of his that did remain in the day of distress (Oba 1:13-14).

So they would stand at the borders, turn the children of Israel back. If any of them escaped, they would turn them over to their enemies. And so God said this was wrong. You should not have done it. And for this cause Edom was to be totally destroyed.

Now the Lord declares,

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For the day of the LORD is near upon all the heathen: and as you have done, it shall be done unto thee (Oba 1:15):

Here is one of those basic truths that we find also expressed in the New Testament, "As a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7). As you have done, so shall it be done unto thee.

thy reward [for that which you have done] will return on your own head. For as ye have drunk upon my holy mountain, so shall all of the heathen drink continually; yes, they shall drink, and they shall swallow down, and they shall be as though they had not been (Oba 1:15-16).

Though Edom is to be destroyed, yet God promises that His people who were being chastised, and Edom was rejoicing in it, they are to be preserved and remain. And so He pronounces the judgment: Edom is to be destroyed.

But upon mount Zion shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness; and the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions (Oba 1:17).

Now that is one thing the house of Jacob has never yet done.

You remember when God was bringing the children of Israel into the land and Joshua was leading them in the conquest of the land. Several times over in Joshua you read, "But they did not possess all of the land." There was a failure to go in and to possess all of their possessions. Now God had promised them the land from the great river in Egypt even to the Euphrates. That is what God had promised to Israel. They have never in all of their history possessed all of that land that God had promised to them. When Joshua was leading the children of Israel into the land that God had promised, God said to Joshua, "Behold, I have given you the land. I'll go before you. I'll drive out the inhabitants, but I'm not going to drive them all out at once. I'll drive them out only as you go in and possess. If I drove them out all at once then the wild beasts and all would come in and you'd have that problem when you arrived. The land would become overgrown and desolate. So I will drive them out little by little before you and every place you put your foot I have given it to you for a possession." In other words, "It's all there, Joshua. It's all yours. All you have to do is go in and lay your foot down on it and say, 'Hey, this is mine.' You have to go in and claim your possession. You have to go in and take by faith that which I have given you and possess the land."

But the sad story of Joshua is the failure of the children of Israel to possess all that God has given to them. The city of the Jebusites was not taken until the time of David, and much of the land of the Philistines was not taken until the time of David. I think of how God has to given to us, as Peter said, "Exceeding rich and precious promises, that by these we might become the partakers of the divine nature" (II Peter 1:4). And yet, how we fail to possess all that God has given to us. There is so much more that God has for us that we have not yet obtained because of our own failure to possess our possessions. It is ours by divine gift. God has promised us these things. But yet, as with

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the children of Israel, through our lack of faith we're not stepping in and laying claim to that which God has promised to us. Yet the same principle is true; every place you place your foot God has given it. Not, "I will give it to you," but, "I have given it to you." It's already given; all you have to do is go in and lay claim to it and these glorious promises of God. What we need to do is to just go in and lay claim. "All right, Lord, You've promised it and I claim it," and begin to possess our possessions.

Now here is the prophecy that the day will come, the day of the Lord is going to come, in which there in Mount Zion will be deliverance. This deliverance in Mount Zion is prophesied in other passages of the Old Testament and is made reference to by Paul in the book of Hebrews when God removes the blindness from the nation of Israel and begins to deal with Israel once again. Romans, chapter 11, "For blindness has happened to Israel in part until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in, and then all Israel shall be saved as saith the scripture. There shall be a deliverer in Zion." So a reference to this passage and other parallel passages in the prophets as God speaks of that last day revival of the Jewish people when God claims them again. God takes back His bride Israel and bestows again His blessing and His favor upon it; the deliverer in Zion. And there shall be holiness, and the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions. Their borders will be expanded to those territories that God promised unto Abraham and also unto Jacob and then unto Moses.

And the house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau for stubble, and they shall kindle in them, and devour them; and there shall not be any remaining of the house of Esau; for the LORD hath spoken it (Oba 1:18).

So Esau is to be destroyed, none remaining, and Jacob, Joseph, shall the tribes of Israel possess.

And they of the south shall possess the mount of Esau; and they of the plain, the Philistines: and they shall possess the fields of Ephraim, and the fields of Samaria: and Benjamin shall possess Gilead. And the captivity of this host of the children of Israel shall possess that of the Canaanites, even to Zarephath; and the captivity of Jerusalem, which is in Sepharad, shall possess the cities of the south. And saviours shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be Jehovah's [or Yahweh's] (Oba 1:19-21).

So the prophecy of Obadiah, basically addressed against Edom, but going into the day of the Lord when God blesses Israel once again when the deliverer is in Zion and the Lord reigns

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Title

The book is named after the prophet who received the vision (1:1). Obadiah means “servant of the LORD” and occurs 20 times in the OT, referring to at least 20 other OT individuals. Obadiah is the shortest book in the OT and is not quoted in the NT.

Author and Date

Nothing is known for certain about the author. Other OT references to men of this name do not appear to be referring to this prophet. His frequent mentions of Jerusalem, Judah, and Zion suggest that he belonged to the southern kingdom (cf. vv. 10–12, 17, 21). Obadiah was probably a contemporary of Elijah and Elisha.

The date of writing is equally difficult to determine, though we know it is tied to the Edomite assault on Jerusalem described in vv. 10–14. Obadiah apparently wrote shortly after the attack. There were 4 significant invasions of Jerusalem in OT history: 1) by Shishak, king of Egypt, ca. 925 B.C. during the reign of Rehoboam (1 Kin. 14:25, 26; 2 Chr. 12); 2) by the Philistines and Arabians between 848–841 B.C. during the reign of Jehoram of Judah (2 Chr. 21:8–20); 3) by Jehoash, king of Israel, ca. 790 B.C. (2 Kin. 14; 2 Chr. 25); and 4) by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, in the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Of these 4, only the second and the fourth are possible fits with historical data. Number two is preferable, since Obadiah’s description does not indicate the total destruction of the city, which took place under Nebuchadnezzar’s attack. Also, although the Edomites were involved in Nebuchadnezzar’s destruction of Jerusalem (Ps. 137; Lam. 4:21), it is significant that Obadiah does not mention the Babylonians by name (as with all the other prophets who wrote about Jerusalem’s fall), nor is there any reference to the destruction of the temple or the deportation of the people; in fact, the captives appear to have been taken to the SW, not E to Babylon (cf. v. 20).

Background and Setting

The Edomites trace their origin to Esau, the firstborn (twin) son of Isaac and Rebekah (Gen. 25:24–26), who struggled with Jacob even while in the womb (Gen. 25:22). Esau’s name means “hairy,” because “he was like a hairy garment all over” (Gen. 25:25). He is also called Edom, meaning “red,” owing to the sale of his birthright in exchange for some “red stew” (Gen. 25:30). He showed a disregard for the covenant promises by marrying two Canaanite women (Gen. 26:34) and later the daughter of Ishmael (Gen. 28:9). He loved the out-of-doors and, after having his father’s blessing stolen from him by Jacob, was destined to remain a man of the open spaces (Gen. 25:27; 27:38–40). Esau settled in a region of mostly rugged mountains S of the Dead Sea (Gen. 33:16; 36:8, 9; Deut. 2:4,5) called Edom (Gr., “Idumea”), the 40 mi. wide area which stretches approximately 100 mi. S to the Gulf of Aqabah. The fabled King’s Highway, an essential caravan route linking North Africa with Europe and Asia, passes along the eastern plateau (Num. 20:17). The struggle and birth of Jacob and Esau (Gen. 25) form the ultimate background to the prophecy of Gen. 25:23, “two nations are

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in your womb.” Their respective descendants, Israel and Edom, were perpetual enemies. When Israel came out from Egypt, Edom denied their brother Jacob passage through their land, located S of the Dead Sea (Num. 20:14–21). Nevertheless, Israel was instructed by God to be kind to Edom (Deut. 23:7, 8). Obadiah, having received a vision from God, was sent to describe their crimes and to pronounce total destruction upon Edom because of their treatment of Israel.

The Edomites opposed Saul (ca. 1043–1011 B.C.) and were subdued under David (ca. 1011–971 B.C.) and Solomon (ca. 971–931 B.C.). They fought against Jehoshaphat (ca. 873–848 B.C.) and successfully rebelled against Jehoram (ca. 853–841 B.C.). They were again conquered by Judah under Amaziah (ca. 796–767 B.C.), but they regained their freedom during the reign of Ahaz (ca. 735–715 B.C.). Edom was later controlled by Assyria and Babylon; and in the fifth century B.C. the Edomites were forced by the Nabateans to leave their territory. They moved to the area of southern Palestine and became known as Idumeans. Herod the Great, an Idumean, became king of Judea under Rome in 37 B.C. In a sense, the enmity between Esau and Jacob was continued in Herod’s attempt to murder Jesus. The Idumeans participated in the rebellion of Jerusalem against Rome and were defeated along with the Jews by Titus in A.D. 70. Ironically, the Edomites applauded the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. (cf. Ps. 137:7) but died trying to defend it in A.D. 70. After that time they were never heard of again. As Obadiah predicted, they would be “cut off forever” (v. 10); “and no survivor shall remain of the house of Esau” (v. 18).

Historical and Theological Themes

The book is a case study of Gen. 12:1–3, with two interrelated themes: 1) the judgment of Edom by God for cursing Israel. This was apparently told to Judah, thereby providing reassurance to Judah that the Day of the Lord (v. 15) would bring judgment upon Edom for her pride and for her participation in Judah’s downfall; 2) Judah’s restoration. This would even include the territory of the Edomites (vv. 19–21; Is. 11:14). Obadiah’s blessing includes the near fulfillment of Edom’s demise (vv. 1–15) under the assault of the Philistines and Arabians (2 Chr. 21:8–20) and the far fulfillment of the nation’s judgment in the first century A.D. and Israel’s final possession of Edom (vv. 15–21).

Interpretive Challenges

The striking similarity between Obad. 1–9 and Jer. 49:7–22 brings up the question: Who borrowed from whom? Assuming there was not a third common source, it appears that Jeremiah borrowed, where appropriate, from Obadiah, since the shared verses form one unit in Obadiah, while in Jeremiah they are scattered among other verses.