



OBADIAH

INTRODUCTION

Author: The name '*Obbadhyah*' means literally, "Servant of Jehovah." It was a common name among the Jews of that time. It was a name borne by a popular Zebulonite of the time of Saul I, Chron. 27:19); a chief servant of the house of Ahab (I Ki. 18:3); a Levite under Josiah (II Chron. 34:12); and several heads of post-exilian houses bore the name also. The Obadiah who wrote the prophecy is not to be confused with any of the above for the circumstances surrounding the date of this book precludes this possibility. If our dating of this book is correct, this is probably the same Obadiah sent out by Jehoshaphat (Jehoram's father) to revive the spirit of true worship in the land by exposition of the law (cf. II Chron. 17:7) and was a contemporary of both Elijah and Elisha who were then prophets in Israel. (see Elijah's letter to Jehoram in II Chron. 21:11-15).

Date: The historical circumstances which called forth this prophecy are evident. An assault on Jerusalem had taken place in which the Edomites, though not the Holy City's principal foe, took part. These Edomites being blood brothers to the Jews (descendants of Esau) were not only malignantly delighted at Jerusalem's calamity but they shared in the plundering of the city and capturing refugees selling them into slavery. Just such an event took place during the reign of Jehoram when the Philistines and Arabians invaded Judah (cf. II Chron. 21:16-17; Amos 1:6). We believe Obadiah's book is properly dated in accordance with this event which occurred approximately 845 B.C. There are other reasons for this early date. The place which the book holds in the canon (being included in the group of Pre-Assyrian "Minor Prophets," Joel, Amos, Hosea, and Jonah). The relationship of Obadiah to other prophets of this period or later who undoubtedly quoted from him (cf. Joel 3:5 and 2:23 with Obad. 17; cf. Amos 1:11 with Obad. 10, 12, 14; cf. Jer. 49:7-27 with the entire book of Obadiah). Obadiah does not mention any of the great monarchies of the world which were known by the later prophets. If he had lived at the time of Isaiah or Jeremiah surely he would have at least mentioned Assyria or Babylon. The few foreigners he does mention are the very ones mentioned in Joel 4:4 as enemies of the kingdom in Joel's day. Obadiah says nothing of a complete destruction of Jerusalem. If he had prophesied after Jeremiah (when Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed the temple and the city) it is most certain he would have alluded to such devastation of the Holy City.

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Background of the Times: Obadiah, if he was born during Jehoshaphat's reign in Judah, lived his early life at a time when religious reform was at its peak in Judah. Jehoshaphat was the second of the five kings of Judah who were outstanding for godliness (the others being Asa, Joash, Hezekiah and Josiah). He took away the high places and Asherim from Judah (II Chron. 17:6), though he apparently was not able to keep the people from using certain high places in worshipping the Lord (I Kings 22:43). For the account of his reign see I Kings 22 and II Chronicles 17-20. He sensed the importance of religious education for the people and sent out princes and priests and Levites to teach the people the law of the Lord. Because of his godly reign "the fear of Jehovah" came upon the nations round about and even the Philistines and the Arabians brought him tribute. In spite of all his godliness he made the fatal mistake of making political and economic alliances with the godless King Ahab of Israel, the northern kingdom. He sanctioned marriage between his son Jehoram and Athaliah, daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. Athaliah was almost as wicked and pagan as her mother. Jehoram took complete charge of the kingdom of Judah at his father's death in 849 B.C. Jehoshaphat had seven sons, and in order that there might not be rivalry for the throne, he gave the younger ones great gifts of silver and gold and precious things, with fortified cities in the kingdom of Judah (II Chron. 21:2-3) but when Jehoram became the sole ruler, he murdered his own brothers. Athaliah, like her wicked mother Jezebel before her, was undoubtedly a great influence on her husband in his evil deeds. As soon as his father died, Jehoram began to slip into the idolatrous ways of the northern kingdom. Edom revolted from under the rule of Judah. Libnah in Judah, a Levitical city far enough from Jerusalem to be somewhat independent, showed its abhorrence of Jehoram's deeds by revolting at the same time (II Kings 8:22). Meanwhile, the great prophet Elijah sent to Jehoram a letter of denunciation for his wickedness. Whether this letter from Elijah was sent after his translation to heaven or not is open to question. God sent a plague upon Judah, especially upon the family of Jehoram. He suffered and died unlamented from a horrible disease. The Arabians or their associated forces slew all of Jehoram's sons (II Chron. 21:17) except Ahaziah, the youngest, who succeeded his father at his death. The Edomites participated in these raids upon Judah and Jerusalem. It was God's message of vengeance upon the enemies of His people and His ultimate victory which Obadiah delivered in writing at this time. During the reign of Jehoshaphat God gave Judah peace and prosperity (II Chron. 20:25-30) but during the reign of Jehoram and

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Ahaziah and because of the wickedness and idolatry of the rulers and the people, God brought judgment upon Judah allowing her enemies to plunder her. For additional background information see Special Studies Nos. Two and Three.

Edomites: (For descriptions of other nations during the Pre-Assyrian days, i.e., Egypt, Syria, Assyrians, etc., see the Introduction section of the other prophecies in this book). Edom, or '*edhom*, means "red" and is, as a nation, descended from Esau (cf. Gen. 25:30; 36:1-8). The country is also called Seir after the mountain plateau area between the Dead Sea and the Gulf of Aqabah where the Edomites dwelt. There is some evidence that the original inhabitants were Horites, or "cave dwellers" (cf. Gen. 14:6). According to archaeological evidence the kingdom of Edom as a monarchy began about 1400 B.C. or before. Edom had kings before the Israelites (Gen. 36:31-39). Before becoming a monarchy the territory was ruled over by tribal chieftians.

The Edomites and the Israelites, although blood brothers, were bitter enemies. The Edomites refused to permit the Israelites to pass through their country as they journeyed toward the Promised Land under Moses (Num. 20:14-21). Saul fought against the Edomites (I Sam. 14:47), but David conquered them and put military garrisons throughout the whole land (II Sam. 8:14). Solomon made Ezion-geber and Eloth seaports from which his ships sailed to Ophir (II Chron. 8:17-18). Judah lost Edom in the reign of Jehoram (at which time the book of Obadiah was probably written) about 847 B.C. (II Kings 8:20-22). About 50 years later Amaziah, king of Judah, inflicted a severe defeat on the Edomites (II Kings 14:7). About 735 B.C. Rezin, king of Syria, at war with Judah, captured Eloth and drove the Jews out of Edomite territory (II Kings 16:6). When Jerusalem was destroyed and Judah depopulated by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C., the Edomites were scattered and forced to flee to the Negeb in the southern part of Palestine. Eventually they penetrated as far north as Hebron. The Edomites were also subject to Babylon. Under the Persian Empire the territory of Edom became a province called Idumea, the Greek form of Edom. In 325 B.C. an Arab tribe known as the Nabateans inhabited Petra the eastern part of Edom's territory. In Maccabean times, John Hyrcanus subdued the Idumeans and forced them to accept Judaism. When the Romans took over Palestine (about 64 B.C.) the Edomites were also included. From Idumea came Antipater, the father of Herod the Great (on the throne when Christ was born). After the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 A.D. the Idumeans disappeared from history. Thus the Edomites came to

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an inglorious end—exiled—having been betrayed and forced to flee their home land of Petra and perishing from the face of the earth in certain fulfillment of the prophecies of Obadiah and the later prophets (see Isa. 34:5-17; Jer. 49:17-22; Ezek. 25:12-14; Malachi 1:1-5).

Purpose and Teaching of Obadiah: Kirkpatrick says, "The teaching of the book of Obadiah is extremely simple." It may be simple but its theme is profound and exciting. There are two prophetic elements in this smallest of Old Testament books which have universal, Messianic significance. First, the judgment of Edom which prophetically prefigures the later judgment of all the nations with the establishment of the universal Messianic Kingdom (v. 15). Second, the captive exiles of Zion will be restored to their home out of which people shall come the Messianic kingdom, that to which all Israel's history pointed, when "the kingdom shall be Jehovah's," (v. 21). Both of these themes find their fulfillment in the coming of the Messiah and the establishment of His Kingdom (the Church). Even as Daniel was to say later, "And in the days of those kings (the Roman kings) shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed, . . . and it shall stand for ever" (Dan. 2:44). When the Messiah came, all other kingdoms were judged and defeated. Although none of the other prophets were dependent upon Obadiah's book as a source for their messages, it was somewhat of a prophetic proto-type. God's message in all the prophets contain the same two basic elements as are given in such an extremely brief way in Obadiah: Judgment and Redemption (see the section on Interpreting the Prophets). Kirkpatrick sees it aright when he says:

" . . . we are still within the narrow limits of Palestine. No larger hope is expressed of the inclusion of the nations in that kingdom. This agrees with the early date of the prophecy. The nations, as in Joel, are the objects of judgment, not of grace. Not until Israel comes into actual contact with Assyria and Egypt in the days of Isaiah and Micah, does *the truth emerge that Israel's mission is to achieve a spiritual conquest of all the nations.*"

The theme of Obadiah is best summed up in v. 21, "The Kingdom shall be Jehovah's!" Around this theme we have selected to outline the book in this manner:

Theme: The Kingdom Shall Be Jehovah's!

- I. Judgment, v. 1-9, upon Edom, enemies of God's people
 - A. Announcement of it by God's prophet, v. 1

- B. Certainty of it in spite of proud past and present fortifications
v. 2-4
 - C. Extent of it—complete annihilation, v. 5-9
- II. Justice, v. 10-16, of God's judgment
- A. Edom did violence to and stood aloof from God's people in times of distress, v. 10-11
 - B. Edom gloated over, boasted, rejoiced, looted and cut off the fugitives of God's people in their day of distress, v. 12-14
 - C. Edom and all peoples who are enemies of God's elect will reap what they have sown, v. 15-16
- III. Jubilance, v. 17-21, God's elect will be victorious
- A. They shall receive and possess the covenant blessings of Jehovah, v. 17, 19, 20
 - B. They shall conquer their enemies, v. 18
 - C. They shall reign as the redeemed, v. 21

ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE CERTAINTY OF EDOM'S JUDGMENT

TEXT: v. 1-4

- 1 The vision of Obadiah. Thus saith the Lord Jehovah concerning Edom: We have heard tidings from Jehovah, and an ambassador is sent among the nations, saying, Arise ye, and let us rise up against her in battle.
- 2 Behold, I have made thee small among the nations; thou art greatly despised.
- 3 The pride of thy heart hath deceived thee, O thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high; that saith in his heart Who shall bring me down to the ground?
- 4 Though thou mount on high as the eagle, and though thy nest be set among the stars, I will bring thee down from thence, saith Jehovah.

QUERIES

- a. Why and how did Jehovah send an "ambassador" among the nations calling them to battle against Edom?
- b. Why did Edom's dwelling place make them proud?
- c. How would God bring them down from their "nest"?