

OBADIAH

Obadiah was written in about 845 B.C. This early date is based upon the text of Obadiah. He speaks of foreigners entering Jerusalem's gates, of Jacob's substance being carried away, of lots being cast upon the city, and of destruction and disaster.

Obadiah's message is twofold:

1. The fall of Edom because of its pride and cruelty against Israel.
2. The exaltation of Zion, when Seir, the Edomite counterpart of Zion, would be cast down.

There are several lessons we can learn from the book of Obadiah.

1. Pride is deceitful and "goes before a fall."
2. The injustice of cruelty, bitterness and passion.
3. Ridicule is always bad for it reveals a low human pride that means an utter lack of brotherly love.
4. One who shares in the spoils of wrong doing, even though he may not be an instigator of the crime, standing on the other side, he becomes one of them, verse 11.
5. As a people sows, so will it reap.
6. In time of divine judgment, God provides a means and a place of escape for those who will turn to Him.

Throughout the writings of the prophets Edom stands as a symbol of the earthly, nonspiritual people of the world. During the later history the Edomites were eventually overcome by the Nabateans, a people who pushed in from the desert and drove the Edomites from their land.

Toward the close of the second century B.C. they were conquered by the Maccabees who forced many of them to be circumcised and to accept the law. Thus, they became nominal Jewish proselytes. By 100 A.D. they had become lost to history.

The name “Obadiah” means “servant of Jehovah.”

ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE CERTAINTY OF EDMOM’S JUDGEMENT

Chapter 1:1-4

SUMMARY

God gave Obadiah a vision concerning the nation of Edom: Jehovah has sent His people good news and He has sent His “ambassadors” among the Gentile nations with a command saying, Attention! I command you to do battle against Edom at My direction.

Verse 1

Through visions God revealed truth in a pictorial form. These visions came at various times (both day and night), and in various ways (asleep at night or awake in the day, in dreams or trances).

What Obadiah writes concerning Edom is specifically claimed to be a divine revelation from Jehovah.

Obadiah was the instrument—not the originator.

These “tidings” of the protection of God by the overthrow of His enemy Edom was designed to be a consolation to the elect as well as a warning to Edom.

God sent an “ambassador” among the Gentile nations commanding them to come against Edom. God uses heathen nations to serve His purpose. God is even portrayed as the “general” over His army of locusts when He brings judgment upon Judah in the days of Joel. So, God called forth the Babylonians and the Romans and others to reduce Edom to ultimate oblivion.

SUMMARY

To Edom Jehovah says, "I have set My mind to reduce your nation to obscurity among the nations of the world and to cause your name to be greatly despised."

Verse 2

Nebuchadnezzar scattered the original Edomites and reduced them to a small, despised people.

They were forced to inhabit the barren, hostile desert of southern Palestine known as the Negeb. The Edomites soon ceased to exist.

SUMMARY

Your seemingly impregnable dwelling place and fortifications, high in the mountain cliffs, have made you haughty and proud. But your pride has deceptively blinded you and caused you to boast.

Verse 3

Petra's location, deep down among the mountains of Seir, was surrounded on all sides with richly colored rocks of simply matchless beauty and grandeur, renders it a "wonder of the desert."

One enters the weird but attractive city enclosure by a narrow gorge, over a mile long, called the cleft.

A tiny stream flows under one's feet much of the way. The chasm is both narrow and deep, often times so contracted as to be almost dark at noonday. The rocks which bound it are tinted most beautifully with all the colors of the rainbow.

The ruins of a castle and of old buildings are the arches of a bridge, and columns, still stand scattered over the bottom of the city's site. Edom's pride and boasting rested on her assumption of strategic impregnability.

The solid stone cliffs were perpendicular, furnishing no niches for scaling them at any place. Through its weird ravines passed camel caravans headed for Egypt and the Mediterranean where their goods were eventually shipped to Greece and Rome. Camel caravans from everywhere paid customs duties and tribute at the gates of Petra.

SUMMARY

Who shall conquer us—no one shall ever bring us down?! But the great God Jehovah announces, "Even if you build your fortifications as high as the eagle flies, or place your nest even higher up in the heavens among the stars, I, Jehovah God, will throw you down into defeat and judgment."

Verse 4

There are a number of references to the eagle as representing power, swiftness, and invincibility. The figure of “setting one’s nest among the stars” is used by other prophets to express human pride.

THE EXTENT OF EDMOM’S JUDGMENT

CHAPTER 1:5-9

SUMMARY

Alas! How you are going to be destroyed! Why, even if thieves or night raiders came upon you, they would steal only as much as they could use or find would they not? Or, imagine yourself as a vineyard—would not even the harvesters fail to gather some of the grapes?

Verse 5

The whole point is the contrast between what man would do to Edom and what God is going to do. If the plundering of Edom was designed and executed by men only there would be some “gleaning” left after the plundering. But it shall not be so when God’s plundering is finished! Nothing will be left.

SUMMARY

Edom’s devastation will be absolutely complete! Her destruction will originate with the God of all the earth who will bring it about through His ministers—both the allies and enemies of Edom.

Verse 6

Edom’s glorious culture, one of the richest of the world then, was plundered by nation after nation. Her people were taken time after time and sold into slavery. The nation was driven from its homeland into the southern deserts of Palestine.

Verse 7

Edom's allies (probably the Arabians with whom Edom joined in the plundering of Judah) secretly plotted her downfall all the while they were banqueting with her around the peace tables.

Edom's neighbors, the Arabians, made commercial treaties with her but betrayed her to her enemies at the same time.

Verse 8

The Lord will take away their discernment, making them to become fools, so that they will be of no help to Edom. Edom was known for its "wise men." God gave these Gentiles up to their own foolishness.

When any people refuses to have God in their knowledge and exchange the truth of God for lies, God gives them up and sends them a strong delusion so that they may believe a lie.

This was what happened to Edom. Proud in her own conceit she became a fool!

Verse 9

With the destruction of wisdom and discernment by the Lord, even the mighty warriors and men of valor lost hope and the nation was cut off.

The Edomites were betrayed by their allies and lost their high, rocky fortress in Petra and were delivered to the borders of their enemies and forced to live in the wastelands of the deserts of southern Palestine, there to become known as the Idumeans.

The Idumeans perished from the earth, as a nation, about 70 A.D.

The Nabateans, from the nomadic Arabian tribes, inhabited the cliffs of Petra but not long, for God's doom had been pronounced against the place.

No longer did the camel caravans pass through the mountains of Seir with their precious cargoes. The great trade center Petra was suddenly cut off from the main highway, the city was left alone in its rocky wilderness.

Soon the people left the cliff side homes that had taken years of patient labor to build. Their fortress wasn't strong enough to hide them from God's judgment. No great battles, no mighty armies, were needed to make God's sure word of prophecy come true.

The changing of a trade route and Petra, the city which had been powerful and rich, became a hollow shell, emptied of all life except the owl and the jackal.

THE JUSTICE OF GOD'S JUDGMENT UPON EDMOM

CHAPTER 1:10-16

SUMMARY

The prophet enumerates the specific crimes against God's elect of which Edom was guilty. He then, using Edom as typical of all that opposes God, pronounces God's judgment upon worldly power and unbelief in the form of the "day of Jehovah."

Verse 10

Wrong or violence is all the more heinous when committed against a brother—the Israelites (Jacob) were brothers to the Edomites (Esau).

The strong ties of blood between the Edomites and the Israelites should have impelled the Edomites to give aid to the oppressed people of Judea, but quite to the contrary, they not only gloated over the plundering of their cities and villages but joined in with the enemies of the Israelites.

The shame of defeat and destruction at the hands of the God of Israel was to come upon this proud, rich and unconquerable people. Their wisdom would be turned into foolishness, their bravery would be turned into cowardice, their proud nation would be turned into an exiled group of desert-dwellers, despised by the Jews.

Verse 11

Not only did the Edomites "stand on the other side" watching with glee the plundering of the city of Jerusalem and other Judean villages by marauding tribes

of Arabians and Philistines, they joined in the desecration of God's holy mountain and thus became an enemy of God in their actions against God's people.

There are those today who need to know that hatred of God's church and His people, is hatred for God. Opposition to the church is declaring war on God. The church is the militant body of Christ engaged in a great spiritual conflict.

Those that are not on God's side, members of His Church, are His enemies.
(James 4:4)

Verse 12

What Edom has done and what has befallen Judah is typical of the future development of the elect of God and of the attitude of worldly principalities toward them until the coming conquest of the Messianic kingdom. Edom's attitude was one of jealous, spiteful, vengeful rejoicing at the calamities of Judah.

Verse 13

The Edomites evidently joined in with the invaders of Jerusalem and other Judean cities in pillaging and despoiling and carrying off their possessions. Pillaging was a much more common accompaniment of invasion in that day than it is now.

Yet God considered it, in this case, an affront to Him because it was done to His people. Someday, just as God's retribution came upon Edom, all His enemies will be judged for their pillaging, plundering, and persecuting of the servants of Jesus Christ through the ages.

Verse 14

The extent of Edom's hate and spite is seen in this verse. They had been, and undoubtedly would be in the future, guilty of fortifying the crossroads, mountain passes and ways of escape against Judeans fleeing the ravages of the Arabians and Philistines and other marauders, capturing the fugitives and selling them into slavery or delivering them into the hands of their enemies.

Verse 15

"The Day of Jehovah," or "... the Day of the Lord" is one of the distinguishing features of the prophetic literature.

“The Day of Jehovah “most often denotes “any great manifestation of God’s power” in judgment or redemption.

The exodus from Egypt, the locust plague of Joel’s day, the captivities, the restoration in the days of Ezra, the coming of the Messiah and the Messianic kingdom (the church), the destruction of Jerusalem—are each called, “The Day of Jehovah.”

The prophets speak of the Day of Jehovah as a day of blessing to those who are right with God, but a Day of Judgment and terror to those who are not.

Every judgment of God upon the wicked world is in a sense and to a certain extent a Day of the Lord.

And so, Obadiah announces the Day of the Lord is near upon all the Nations. What Edom has sown, she shall reap. As she despised and plundered God’s covenant people so she shall be despised and overthrown by God.

Verse 16

Edom stands as a symbol or type of all the enemies of God’s covenant people. All world powers or worldly minded people, who are enemies of God shall drink of the wine of God’s wrath.

The nations who mocked and desecrated God’s church shall be mocked and desecrated at His hand, beginning with the establishment of His kingdom.

VICTORY FOR GOD’S COVENANT PEOPLE

CHAPTER 1:17-21

SUMMARY

While God’s Day of Judgment is coming upon all His enemies, He will be delivering His covenant people; they shall be made holy and shall be given the spiritual blessings He promised they would possess when He spoke to the patriarchs.

Verse 17

God, through the prophet, extends His strong right arm of salvation and victory to the covenant people, making “Zion” a place of escape. Mount Zion, the southeastern hill of Jerusalem, is the place where the presence of God dwelt according to the Old Testament way of saying things. Mount Zion became the symbol of Messianic deliverance, peace, security and realization of the promises made to the fathers (patriarchs).

Now God started His work of redemption through the Messianic kingdom when He first made the promise in Genesis 3:15. All who, by faith, kept covenant with God (in whatever covenant they found themselves) found their deliverance in Mount Zion.

All who remained true to God in the Old Testament times—ever looking forward in faith to what God was going to do on Mount Zion—had deliverance, for Christ died for the transgressions done aforetime. (Hebrews 9:15-17)

As a result of the future deliverance which will be accomplished ultimately by the Messiah there shall also come an imputed holiness or perfection.

Jacob possessing his possessions was never completely fulfilled until the coming of the Messiah. In the Old Testament God promised to the patriarchs a certain land for their habitation; He promised a proliferous progeny; He promised that all the nations of the earth would be blessed through their seed.

The Lord did not give them a land and numerous offspring. And even when God took them from their land in chastisement for their idolatry and sent them Into exile, He promised to return them to their land.

When the Jews returned from the Babylonian captivity under Ezra and others, they did not repossess all their former land. A large portion of the land originally given to them by God was possessed by other nations and never regained by the Jews.

Verses 18-19

In spite of the fact that the Jews never again repossessed the entire land promised to them Obadiah prophesies that they shall not only regain all that had

been promised to them but the covenant people would also possess territory which had never been promised them—namely Edom.

In verse 18 Jacob represents the southern kingdom, Judah, while Joseph represents the northern kingdom, Israel.

The fulfillment of this prophecy had its beginning when the Edomites were expelled for their homeland sometime between 550 and 400 B.C. by the Nabateans.

The Edomites were driven to the southern wastelands of the desert Negeb, where they became the Idumeans.

Verse 20

The ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy of Obadiah concerning Jacob and Joseph possessing even Edom is to be tied directly to the prophecy made by Balaam in Numbers 24:17-18. There it is prophesied that Edom (Seir) is to be a possession of Israel when “the star comes forth out of Jacob and the scepter out of Israel.”

This of course, points to fulfillment in the Messianic age. Amos 9:11-12 reveals that when the “tabernacle” (family, dynasty) of David has been rebuilt, not only will the remnant of Edom be possessed by the covenant people but all the nations.

The fulfillment of this, for it has the sanction of apostolic pronouncement (Acts 15:13-18) as having been fulfilled when the Gentiles were received into the New Testament church. And so, the book of Acts records the fulfillment of Obadiah, verses 17-21, the church’s victorious conquest of the Gentiles by the preaching of the gospel.

Verse 21

The word “saviors” is the same word used for “judges.” These “saviors” would not come upon mount Esau to inflict punitive judgment but to bring deliverance.

Deliverers will be sent (in the Messianic age) to Edom so that even a remnant of Edom (Amos 9:12) will be saved. These “saviors” are those who were ambassadors taking His gospel to all the world enlarging His kingdom.

Both Edom and Zion fade from view as all becomes His! All kingdoms are united in that one kingdom, and God is all in all. It began when the “One Shepherd” united all God’s sheep in “one flock” and will find its consummation when the Savior appears the second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for Him. (Hebrew 9:28)

God’s goal, as Obadiah sees it, is the fulfillment of God’s covenant promises. In one form or another this is the closing note of almost every prophetic book in the Old Testament.

The composite picture is that of the victory of God and His kingdom over every foe; of unbroken fellowship between a people finally made holy to the Lord and their ever-present faithful God; of a new covenant which does not supplant but fulfills the old.