

# Pre-Exilic Prophet: **OBADIAH**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Obadiah is the shortest book in the Old Testament and one of the shortest books in the whole Bible, consisting of just one chapter and twenty-one verses.

We don't know much about the author of Obadiah, other than his name. There are thirteen men in the Old Testament named Obadiah, but it's unclear which Obadiah (or if any of these thirteen) wrote this book. Therefore, it's also difficult to confirm the date or place the book was written. While scholars aren't in unison as to the date of the authorship, there seems to be good evidence it was written after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. during Zedekiah's reign or the invasion of Jerusalem (by the Philistines and Arabians, 2 Chronicles 21:16) during Jehoram's reign. The book of Obadiah is primarily concerned with Edom's actions toward Judah and Jerusalem, so it's likely that the author was a resident of Judah, and the original recipients of the prophecy were the people of Judah.

The main antagonists throughout the book of Obadiah are the Edomites, who are descendants of Isaac's son Esau. (Edom and Esau are used interchangeably throughout the book.) The book was written as a prophecy against the Edomites—to announce the coming judgment on the people of Edom (and to implicitly remind the Israelites of the future hope that they had in the Lord). It's also possible that Edom is a larger metaphor for all of Israel's enemies, given the length, consistency, and intensity of Edom's enmity with Israel. The people of Edom lived on a mountain, giving them apparent security from their enemies.

The book of Obadiah is a clear message that God's purpose for Israel will not be thwarted. He will keep his people until the end. His sovereignty will reign supreme even when people oppose him and his people. The end of the book points to Jesus in the final establishment of God's kingdom.

## **IMAGE FOR UNDERSTANDING**

The "day of the Lord" is a common theme in the Minor Prophets, including Obadiah (Obadiah 1:15) where God's judgment is applied to Edom for not coming to Israel's aid when they were attacked by the Babylonians. Picture a judge rendering a verdict in a courtroom. The picture of judgment is often one that is hard for believers to picture, knowing that we have a loving God (Psalm 136) and that all have fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3). God was relentless in his love for his chosen people Israel and would go to any length to protect and redeem them. The good news for those who know Jesus is that God will remember our sins "no more" (Hebrews 8:12).

## **BOOK ORGANIZATION / OUTLINE**

Chapter 1:1-9: Edom's coming judgment

Chapter 1:10-14: Edom's crimes against Judah

Chapter 1:15-21: The restoration of Israel's sovereignty

## **JESUS IN THE BOOK OF OBADIAH**

In the book of Obadiah, we catch glimpses of Jesus woven through the prophecy. The sibling rivalry between Jacob (Israel) and Esau (Edom) ultimately points us to Christ, who, as a descendant of Jacob, later stood before Herod, a descendant of Esau, in one of His final moments on earth. Obadiah also contrasts the “cup” Edom drank—the cup of judgment for sin (1:16)—with the cup of salvation Jesus drank for us in His suffering and death. The book closes with a vision of God's kingdom fully established, anticipating the reign of Jesus Christ over all nations, when “the kingdom will be the Lord's” (1:21). In all of this, Obadiah reminds us of God's radical love for His people and how that love is ultimately fulfilled and extended through Jesus to all who believe in Him.

## **BIBLE STUDY SPECIFICS: HOW WE SHOULD READ THE BOOK OF OBADIAH**

### **OBSERVATION**

- Who: Pay attention to who's involved. List out the key names and groups: Edom, Jacob/Israel, the nations, Mount Zion, the Lord. Notice the relational dynamics—especially the family tie between Jacob and Esau that frames the whole book.
- What's Repeated? Look for repeated phrases like “day of the Lord” (vv. 15–16), “nations,” “Mount Zion,” and “the house of...” Repetition is the author's way of waving a flag—pay attention there.

### **INTERPRETATION**

- Literary Context: Ask why Edom is judged so severely.
- Theological Context: What does Obadiah teach us about God's character? His justice?
- Historical Context: Obadiah shows God's love and plan for Israel. While many scholars believe the Church is *not* a replacement for Israel, we share in God's promises through Jesus (Rom. 11). This guards against misreading the book as “just history” or “only for Israel.” However, this book was written to a specific people at a specific time in history. What was going on then, and how would the original audience have heard it?

### **APPLICATION**

- While the primary objective of Obadiah was to pronounce judgment on Israel's enemies, we see that the root of Edom's sin was pride. This had rippling consequences into Edom's actions toward the nation of Israel with whom Edom had shared roots. Oftentimes pride manifests itself in consequences we don't anticipate. Do you have pride in your life that you're not aware of? Ask for input from your community group, friends, and/or spouse.

- The Bible is filled with books and chapters like Obadiah that are easy to gloss over, if we aren't careful. All scripture is God-breathed and useful in our daily lives (2 Timothy 3:16). How are you doing in treasuring ALL of God's Word, even the parts that (at first) seem difficult to interpret or apply?

## PRAYER

- Pray for the nations—for nations where the gospel has not been preached. Pray that they would hear and receive the good news.
- Pray for those you know who are not yet believers, whose hearts have been hardened like the nation of Edom.
- Pray for yourself—for the Lord to protect you from the sin of pride and apathy.

## CHURCH HISTORY: WHAT HAS CHURCH HISTORY SAID ABOUT THE BOOK OF OBADIAH

"It is quite evident this was fulfilled when those saved again out of Mount Sion— that is, the [believers](#) in Christ from [Judea](#), of whom the [apostles](#) are chiefly to be acknowledged—went up to defend Mount [Esau](#). How could they defend it except by making safe, through the preaching of the gospel, those who [believed](#) that they might be delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God?" - Augustine, *City of God*

"We are daily saved, for the text says, 'Upon Mount Zion shall be deliverance.' Salvation abides there at all times. Not only have we been saved, but we are saved continually from all evil. If we fall into trouble at any time, we fly to Jesus. If we have hourly temptations, we look to Jesus for hourly succor. We have present salvation. Let us not think of our salvation as a matter which was finished in us on a certain day and then and there ended. Conversion is the beginning of sanctification and sanctification is the life-long working out of salvation. Grace will always be needed from day to day until we enter into Glory. In Mount Zion, in Christ Jesus, in the Word, and in the Church of God there is a fountain of salvation which never dries up. If it is so, let us enjoy it, without stint, now and always! Let us be rich in abiding treasure. Let us be happy in never-failing safety and let us seek to bring this deliverance to others." - Charles Spurgeon, *Possessing Possessions*

