

'Minor Prophets' (2) - Obadiah

Obadiah is the shortest, and perhaps the earliest, of the writing prophets. The message of Obadiah concerns the judgement on Edom. Judgement that came because of the lack of brotherly love toward v10 "*thy brother Jacob*". One of the key lessons from Obadiah is, as the poet has said, "This troubled world is not my final home". God takes note of the actions of wicked men and a day of account is coming. On that day, v15 "*For in the day of the Lord*", Edom will receive her reward "*thy reward shall return upon thine own head*" and Israel will triumph "*but upon Mount Zion shall be deliverance*".

Read – Obadiah 1 - 21

v1 – 9 Judgement on Edom:

v1 Summary verse – "*Thus saith the Lord God concerning Edom*"

v2 – 4 Pride of Edom – v3 "*The pride of thine heart*"

v5 – 9 Destruction of Edom v9 "*everyone ... may be cut off by slaughter*"

v10 – 14 Denunciation of Edom:

v10 Summary verse – "*For thy violence against thy brother Jacob*"

v11 – 14 The Failure of Brotherly Love v12 "*thou shouldest not have looked on the day of thy brother*"

v15 – 21 Fate of Edom:

v15 Summary verse – "*the day of the Lord ... as thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee*"

v16 – 21 The Future End of Edom and Triumph of Israel

v1 – 9 Judgement on Edom:

v1 "*The vision of Obadiah*". Of Obadiah, whose name means 'servant of the Lord' we are told nothing. He is a servant of the Lord, who faithfully brings the message of the Lord. Is this our ambition, to be a faithful servant of the Lord in whatever He would call us to do?

The message of Obadiah was the word of the Lord "*concerning Edom*". Edom was the territory settled by Esau's descendents (see Gen 32 v 3). It is the mountainous region south east of the Dead Sea. The capital city was Sela (known today as Petra in Jordan) and was perched high on a plateau above a sheer rock cliff approached by a narrow gorge. It was virtually impregnable and this gave the Edomites their confidence v3 "*Who shall bring me down to the ground?*" Sela is the Hebrew word which means 'craggy rock' and is the word translated "*rock*" in v3.

The date of this prophecy has generated debate and depends on when the events described in v10 – 14 took place, a day of calamity and distress for Jerusalem. There are several devastating invasions of Judah recorded in the Bible, between the 9th and 6th century BC e.g. by Shishak king of Egypt (1 Kings 14), by the Philistines and Arabians (11 Chron 21) and at the time of the Babylonian captivity (11 Kings 25). Other commentators have suggested that this does not describe any particular event, but the constant hostility of Edom toward "*thy brother Jacob*." The prophecy of Obadiah is quoted by other Old Testament prophets e.g. Jer 49 v7 – 22.

This summary verse for the opening section describes an ambassador who is sent to gather forces for the campaign. Perhaps Nebuchadnezzar, although the final destruction of Edom was much later in history.

In v2 – 4 the pride of Edom is described. Edom trusted in their fortress home, believed it to be impregnable and boasted *“Who shall bring me down to the ground?”* However, they had forgotten about God, *“thence will I bring thee down, saith the Lord.”* Pride was the sin of ‘Lucifer, son of the morning’ (see Isa 14) and a sin warned against in the New Testament e.g. 1 Tim 3 v 6. We must beware, be on our guard for there are many things of which we can be proud, forgetting that all we are and have are gifts from God.

Despite the boast of Edom, their destruction will be complete (v5, 6). If thieves had come they would only take what they desired and grape gatherers would leave gleanings, but Edom would be stripped bare. Their hidden treasures would be found and all that they had lain up plundered.

In v7 – 9 Obadiah describes the fulfilment of v15 *“as thou hast done it, it shall be done unto thee”*. This principle is repeated in the New Testament e.g. Gal 6 v 7. Friends and allies will turn against Edom, and yet this is exactly what they were guilty of - v10 *“For thy violence against thy brother Jacob”*. The wounds of a friend are hard to take (compare Psa 41 v 9)

v10 – 14 Denunciation of Edom:

This section gives the reason for God’s judgement on Edom. The summary verse v10 *“For thy violence against thy brother Jacob ... thou shalt be cut off for ever.”* The antagonism of Edom and Jacob began in the womb (Gen 25 v 22) and reached its peak when Jacob, by deception, gained the blessing due to the eldest son (Gen 27 v 41). The history of their descendants was continued antagonism of Esau toward his brother, Jacob. In v10 – 14, a time described as a day of destruction (v12), distress (v12) and calamity (v13) for Jacob is highlighted. At this time we see the antagonism and hatred of Edom full blown. The charge laid against them was a failure of brotherly love. In the day when Nebuchadnezzar plundered Jerusalem, Psa 137 tells of the response of the Edomites *“who said, rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof.”* In these verses a catalogue of charges are brought, *“thou shouldst not ... neither shouldst thou”*. In v11 Edom was guilty of standing by in the day of ‘his brother’s need’, in v12 Edom rejoices at his brother’s distress, in v13 Edom joins the plundering of Jerusalem and in v14 Edom prevented the escape of the children of Jacob, took them captive and handed them over to the enemy. However, God had taken note and v10 *“For thy violence against thy brother Jacob ... thou shalt be cut off for ever.”*

When it comes to brotherly love, how do we measure up? The exhortation of the New Testament is to ‘love one another’ – 1 John 4 v 21 *“That he who loveth God love his brother also.”* In v11 Obadiah writes, *“In the day that thou stoodest on the other side”*. Could this be said of us? In the day when our brother is in need, is in difficulty, are we there to help? Or are we guilty, like Edom, of standing on the other side? (compare priest / Levite in parable of Good Samaritan Luke 10 v 31, 32)

v15 – 21 Fate of Edom:

The ultimate doom of Edom and triumph of Israel. v15, the summary verse for the section, states that “the day of the Lord is near” and in that day *“as thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee”*. The day of the Lord is the period of time, yet future, when God intervenes in the affairs of earth and brings judgement on wicked men. It is a time when righteous judgement is seen, when matters are put right. As Edom v16 *“have drunk upon my holy mountain”* i.e. drank in victory, so the nations shall drink on the conquering of Edom.

In v17 and 18 we are presented with the future and final triumph of Israel. As the day of the Lord will bring deserved judgement on the wicked nations, and individual men, so it will bring restoration and blessing for the people of God. Mount Zion shall again be possessed by Israel and shall be holy (see v17). In that coming day the descendants of Edom will fall before the people they once despised. As stubble before a fire, they will be powerless to resist. In the last few verses Obadiah describes a united Israel spreading through and possessing the land promised since the days of Abraham. This is a millennium picture v21 *“and the kingdom shall be the Lord’s.”*