

Introduction to Obadiah
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Author:

The author of the book is Obadiah. His name means “Servant of the Lord.” References to the southern kingdom of Judah might suggest he was from that region (Oba 1:10-12, 17, 21). There are about a dozen men named Obadiah in the OT, and we cannot dogmatically identify the author with any of them. Obadiah is the shortest book in the OT.

Audience:

Obadiah writes to Edomites, who were the offspring of Esau, the brother of Jacob (Gen 25:30). The land of Edom was south of Judah “in the hill country of Seir” (Gen 36:8-9; cf. Deu 2:4-5). It’s the location of modern day Petra.

Date of ministry:

There are no historical markers in the book that allow us to date it. The two most commonly accepted periods are 1) during the reign of Jehoram, who reigned from 852-841 B.C. (2 Ki 8:20-22; 2 Ch 21:8-10), or 2) during the Babylonian exile in 586 B.C. (Ps 137:7-8; Lam 4:18-22; Eze 25:12-14; 35:1-15). Both times and situations describe Edom treating Judah with hostility; however, the latter date is preferred. The literary style of Obadiah 1:1-9 bears striking resemblance to Jeremiah 49:7-22, which might further argue for a date near 586 B.C.

Background:

The message of Obadiah takes into account a long history of hostility between Edom and Israel. The struggle goes back to Esau who hated his brother, Jacob, and desired to kill him (Gen 27:41). Esau’s descendants, the Edomites, continued their hostility toward Israel from Moses down to the time of Israel’s captivity in Babylon (Num 20:14-21; Amo 1:11; Eze 25:12-14; 35:5, 11-12).

Edomites were frequently at odds with Israel and her neighbors. They opposed Saul (ca. 1043–1011 BC; 1 Sam 14:47), but were later subdued under David (ca. 1011–971 BC; 2 Sam 8:13–14). They were also subjugated by Solomon (ca. 971–931 BC; 1 Kgs 11:14–25), allowing him to build a fleet of ships at Ezion-geber ‘in the land of Edom’ (1 Kgs 9:26). They fought against

Jehoshaphat (ca. 873–848 BC; 1 Kgs 22:47; 2 Chron 20) and successfully rebelled against Jehoram (ca. 852–841 BC; 2 Kgs 8:20–22; 2 Chron 21:8–10). They were again conquered by Judah under Amaziah (ca. 796–767 BC; 2 Kgs 14:7), but they regained their freedom during the reign of Ahaz (ca. 735–715 BC). Edom was later controlled by Assyria and Babylon. In the fourth century BC the Edomites were forced by the Nabateans to leave their territory. They moved to the area of southern Palestine and became known as Idumeans.¹

At the time Obadiah wrote, the Edomites were guilty of assisting the Babylonians in their attack against Judah that led to their captivity. Herod the Great, who came to rule over Judea in 37 B.C. was an Idumean. “The Idumeans participated in the rebellion of Jerusalem against Rome and were defeated along with the Jews by Titus in AD 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).”²

Message:

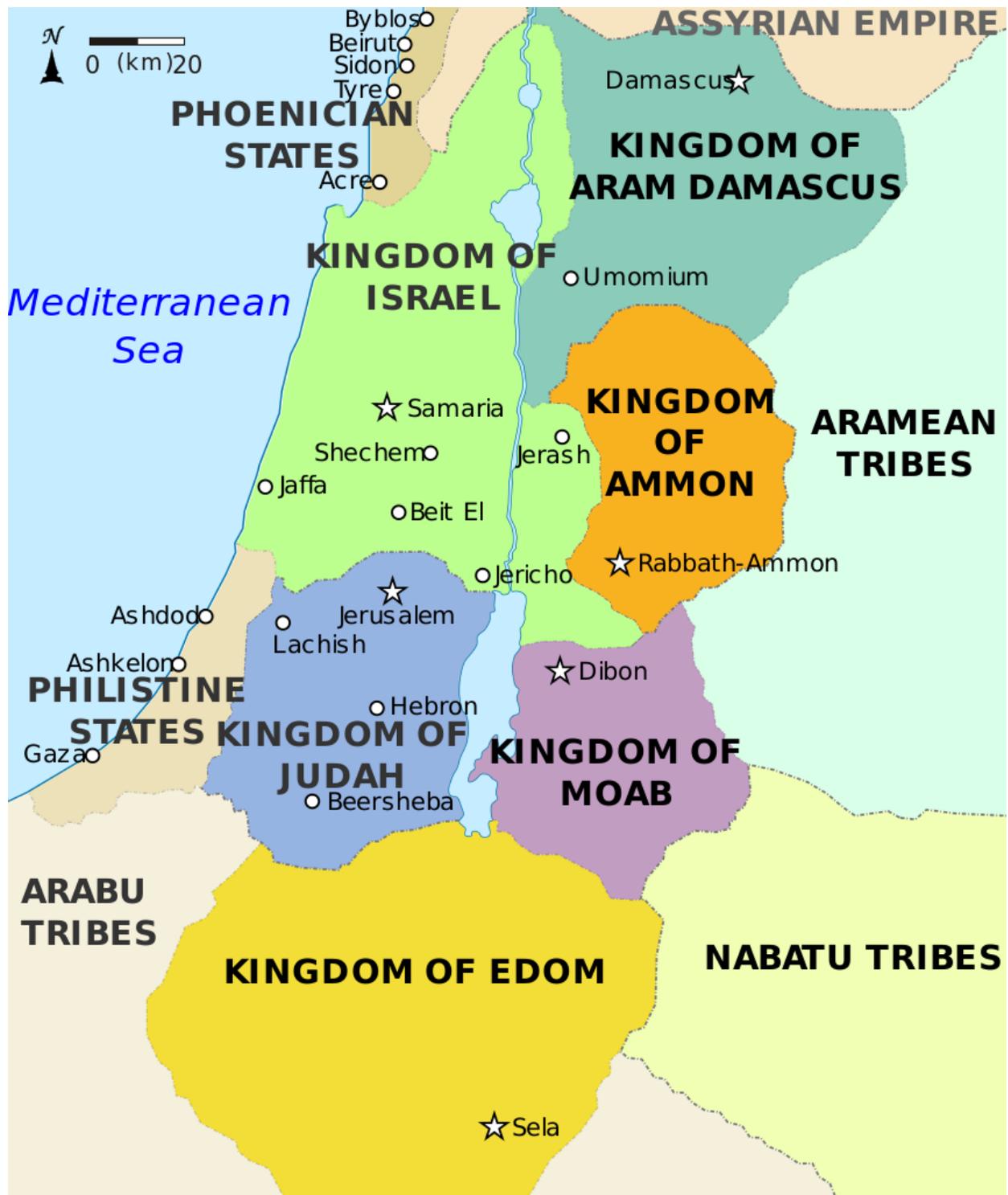
God dispensed retributive judgment upon Edom because of their arrogance and hostility toward Judah (Oba 1:9, 15, 18). The book of Obadiah is an example of God cursing those who curse Israel (Gen 12:1-3). The Lord tells Edom, “As you have done, it will be done to you. Your dealings will return on your own head” (Oba 1:15).

Outline:

1. God will judge Edom (Oba 1:1-9)
2. Edom’s sins (Oba 1:10-14)
3. Emphasis on Israel’s deliverance and promise of blessing (Oba 1:15-21)

¹ Irvin A. Busenitz, *Commentary on Joel and Obadiah*, Mentor Commentaries (Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-shire, Great Britain: Mentor, 2003), 237.

² *Ibid.*, 238.



Obadiah 1:1-21

The vision of Obadiah. Thus says the Lord GOD אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה *Adonai Yahweh* – the sovereign Lord] concerning Edom [Israel’s age-old enemy] -- We have heard a report from the LORD, and an envoy has been sent among the nations *saying*, “Arise and let us [Edom] go against her for battle” -- ² “Behold, I will make you small among the nations [future judgment is coming]; you are greatly despised. ³ “The arrogance of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rock, in the loftiness of your dwelling place, who say in your heart, ‘Who will bring me down to earth?’ [Edom’s arrogant attitude; cf. [Pro 16:18](#); [18:12](#); [29:23](#)] ⁴ “Though you build high like the eagle, though you set your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down,” declares the LORD. ⁵ “If thieves came to you, if robbers by night – O how you will be ruined! -- Would they not steal *only* until they had enough? If grape gatherers came to you, would they not leave *some* gleanings? ⁶ “O how Esau will be ransacked [Esau = Edom], and his hidden treasures searched out! ⁷ “All the men allied with you will send you forth to the border [i.e. disassociate with them], and the men at peace with you will deceive you and overpower you [betray their trust]. *They who eat your bread* will set an ambush for you [close friends will be turned to enemies]. (There is no understanding in him.) ⁸ “Will I not on that day,” declares the LORD, “Destroy wise men from Edom and understanding from the mountain of Esau? [intelligent leaders will not save] ⁹ “Then your mighty men will be dismayed, O Teman [a city in Edom], so that everyone may be cut off from the mountain of Esau by slaughter [the mighty will be slaughtered]. ¹⁰ “Because of violence to your brother Jacob, you will be covered *with* shame, and you will be cut off forever [God will bring retribution]. ¹¹ “On the day that you stood aloof [watched and did nothing], on the day that strangers carried off his wealth, and foreigners entered his gate and cast lots for Jerusalem -- you too were as one of them [guilty as though they were committing the crime themselves]. ¹² “Do not gloat over your brother’s day, the day of his misfortune. And do not rejoice over the sons of Judah in the day of their destruction; yes, do not boast in the day of *their* distress. ¹³ “Do not enter the gate of My people in the day of their disaster. Yes, you, do not gloat over their calamity in the day of their disaster. And do not loot their wealth in the day of their disaster [Edom robbed Israelites]. ¹⁴ “Do not stand at the fork of the road to cut down their fugitives [to harm those fleeing for safety]; and do not imprison their survivors in the day of their distress. ¹⁵ “For the day of the LORD draws near on all the nations [the day of the Lord = the day the Lord intervenes in judgment]. As you have done, it will be done to you. Your dealings will return on your own head [God promises retributive justice]. ¹⁶ “Because just as you drank on My holy mountain, all the nations will drink continually. They will drink and swallow and become as if they had never existed [drink of God’s judgment and be exterminated].

¹⁷ “But on Mount Zion there will be those who escape, and it will be holy [undefiled]. And the house of Jacob will possess their possessions [land, city, temple and kingdom]. ¹⁸ “Then the house of Jacob [the southern kingdom] will be a fire and the house of Joseph [the northern kingdom] a flame [a reunited kingdom]; but the house of Esau *will be* as stubble. And they [Israel] will set them on fire and consume them, so that there will be no survivor of the house of Esau,” For the LORD has spoken. ¹⁹ Then *those of* the Negev [south of Judah] will possess the mountain of Esau, and *those of* the Shephelah the Philistine plain; also, possess the territory of Ephraim and the territory of Samaria, and Benjamin *will possess* Gilead. ²⁰ And the exiles of this host of the sons of Israel, who are *among* the Canaanites as far as Zarephath, and the exiles of Jerusalem who are in Sepharad will possess the cities of the Negev [God will use these nations to destroy Esau]. ²¹ The deliverers will ascend Mount Zion to judge the mountain of Esau, and the kingdom will be the LORD’S.

Summary:

Obadiah opens with a message from God against the Edomites, Israel’s longstanding enemy since the days of Jacob and Esau. God had been patient with them for nearly 900 hundred years (1445 B.C. to 586 B.C.), but finally rendered retributive judgment upon them. The judgment upon Edom is a demonstration of God’s promise to curse those who curse Israel (Gen 12:3). The Edomites in Obadiah’s day were arrogant and thought they were untouchable, but God declares that He will bring the nation down in judgment (Oba 1:1-4). Unlike thieves and grape-gatherers who leave something behind, God will not leave any Edomites after He brings judgment (Oba 1:5-6). The Edomites enjoyed close relations with her allies, but those allies would become her enemies (Oba 1:7), and Edom could not rely on their wise men (Oba 1:8), nor their mighty soldiers to protect them from the Lord’s judgment (Oba 1:9). God gives the reason for His judgment on Edom, saying, “Because of violence to your brother Jacob, you will be covered *with* shame, and you will be cut off forever” (Oba 1:10). Edom stood at a distance and watched the destruction of Judah, “On the day that strangers carried off his wealth, and foreigners entered his gate and cast lots for Jerusalem – you too were as one of them” (Oba 1:11). Not only did Edom do nothing to help Israel, they actually rejoiced at their destruction and apparently entered the city and helped plunder their wealth (Oba 1:12-13). Furthermore, they attacked and imprisoned fleeing Israelites and turned them over to the Babylonians (Oba 1:14). Obadiah then refers to *the day of the Lord*, which has both a historical and eschatological meaning in which God intervenes as a Warrior who judges Israel’s enemies. In the immediate sense, the Lord will judge Edom, declaring, “As you have done, it will be done to you. Your dealings will return on your own head” (Oba 1:15). In the future sense, God will judge all the nations of the world during

the Tribulation and the Second Coming of Christ. Just as Edom had participated in a drunken celebration in Jerusalem, so they, and all the nations who are hostile toward Israel, will become drunk with God's wrath and eventually be destroyed (Oba 1:16). But God promises to restore Israel and their blessings (Oba 1:17), and to destroy Edom (Oba 1:18). In the future, Israel will possess territories that had been promised to her (Oba 1:19-20), and "The deliverers will ascend Mount Zion to judge the mountain of Esau, and the kingdom will be the LORD'S" (Oba 1:21). In the future, Israel will be restored to her land, her enemies judged, and the kingdom established on earth. In all this, God is faithful to His Word and to His people, to judge and bless.