

Lesson 12 – Obadiah

There are two views on the date of Obadiah: the mid-9th and 6th centuries BC. The early view proposes that Obadiah's charges concern Edom's taunting and refusal to aid during Jehoram's reign when Philistines and Arabians raided Judah. But the raids were divine punishment, and at that time, Edom was struggling to liberate itself from Judean oppression. The later view, which is preferred by scholars, proposes that Obadiah described Edomite atrocities during the fall of Jerusalem. Psalm 137, composed during the Babylonian exile, calls upon God to punish Edom for its taunts against Jerusalem during the Babylonian siege. Obadiah's message is also very similar to the 6th century BC prophets (Jer. 49:7-22; Eze. 35:1-15), with parts containing near-identical wording. For these reasons, I prefer the later date.

Edom's territory was a land of rocky canyons. This provided a natural defense from invasion, which enabled Edom's arrogant pride. The Edomites descended from Esau, Jacob's brother, so they were related to the Israelites (Gen. 36:9; Obad. 1:10). However, their interactions were anything but brotherly. Edom refused to let the Israelites pass through Edom on their way to Canaan after the Exodus, and the two were at war throughout their history, with several high-casualty battles recorded in the book of Kings. Edom rejoiced over the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC and apparently aided Babylon by capturing Judean refugees (Obad. 1:14).

In 553 BC, King Nabonidus of Babylon conquered Edom, ending the Edomite kingdom and significantly weakening their national identity. Afterward, Nabatean tribes migrated westward into Edom's land, and the Edomites migrated into southern Judah and the Negeb. During the Greek period, the Edomites came to be known as the Idumeans, thus their territory is called Idumea in the New Testament. In the 2nd century BC, they became integrated into the Jewish population and followed the Law of Moses. The Herods were among the last identifiable Edomites in history. After the first century AD, the Edomites vanished.

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1. What does the name Obadiah mean?
2. From whom did the Edomites descend, and what was his connection to the Israelites? (Gen. 36:9; 25:21-26; 35:10)
3. How did Edom treat the Israelites after the Exodus? (Num. 20:14-21)
4. What was Edom's relationship with Israel like for most of their history? (1 Sam. 14:47; 2 Sam. 8:11-14; 1 Kings 11:14-17; 2 Kings 8:20-22; 14:7)
5. What did Edom do when Judah was attacked by Babylon? What did Edom intend to do after Jerusalem fell? (Psa. 137:7; Eze. 35; Obad. 1:10-14)
6. Research the kind of land Edom possessed. How was this relevant to Obadiah's and Jeremiah's reproof? (Obad. 1:2-4; Jer. 49:15-16)
7. What may we infer about Edom's religion from 2 Chron. 25:14?

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8. When Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and exiled the Jews, Edom felt superior, because they had not yet been conquered. In fact, they gradually moved into southern Judah. What would be the ultimate outcome for the Jews and Edomites? (Obad. 1:17-21)
9. When did the Kingdom of Edom end, and who conquered it?
10. What was Edom called by the Greeks and Romans? (Mark 3:8)
11. Who were the last identifiable Edomites? When did they vanish from history?
12. What lessons can be learned from Obadiah? (Prov. 16:18)
13. What did God say about Jacob (Israel) and Esau (Edom) in Malachi 1:2-5? Explain what is meant by "love" and "hate" in this context. (Rom. 9:4-13)