

# The Book of the Twelve: Obadiah (Servant of YHWH)

## 1. Historical Background:

- a. Shortest book in the Old Testament, 21 verses.
- b. Edom was located geographically to the southeast of Jerusalem, below the Dead Sea.
- c. The Edomites were the descendants of Esau
- d. Obadiah draws on the historical narrative of Jacob and Esau in his prophetic judgments against Edom and all nations.
- e. At times, Edom was subject to Israel's kings (1 Samuel 14:47; 2 Samuel 8:13-14; 1 Kings 11:15-17, 22:48) and later achieved independence during the reign of Jehoram, king of Israel (2 Kings 8:20-22).
- f. Edom regularly committed criminal acts against Israel (2 Chronicles 21:16-17; Psalm 137:7).

## 2. Additional Old Testament Background:

- a. The book of Obadiah is directed against the Edomites, who were descended from Esau.
- b. Esau was Jacob's older twin brother (Gen 25:19-28), sons of Isaac & Rebekah.
- c. A rivalry between the two grew when Esau sold his birthright for a bowl of soup (Gen 25:29-35), and Jacob impersonated Esau to receive Isaac's blessing (Gen 27).
- d. Jacob fled to the north to stay with his uncle Bethuel, eventually marrying Leah and Rachel, and Esau married a Canaanite woman and the daughter of his half-uncle, Ishmael, settling in the southeast of the Dead Sea.
- e. Jacob returned home and was reconciled with Esau (sort of) (Gen 33).
- f. When the Israelites were coming to the Promised Land, the Edomites refused them passage through their land (Num 20:14-21).
- g. Doeg the Edomite was a companion of Saul and enemy of David.
- h. David added Edom to the Israelite "empire" (2 Sam 8:13-14).
- i. Hadad the Edomite led a rebellion against Solomon (1 Kings 11:14-22).
- j. The Edomites fought with both Israel and Judah against the Moabites (2 Kings 3).
- k. The Edomites revolted against Judah in the days of King Jehoram (2 Kings 8:20-22) and became independent.
- l. King Amaziah of Judah also fought against the Edomites (2 Kings 14:8-10), and after he conquered them, he worshipped their gods (2 Chron 25:14-16).
- m. The Edomites even invaded Judah in the days of King Ahaz (2 Chron 28:17).
- n. The Edomites are among the enemies of God in the Psalms, especially for their gloating at the destruction of Jerusalem (Psalm 137:7).
- o. Prophecies against Edom are also found in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Joel, Amos and Malachi.

## 3. Genre:

- a. Prophetic book; Hebrew poetry; oracles of judgment (against Edom and nations).
- b. Oracles of Judgment are a common feature in prophetic books
- c. There are more prophetic oracles against Edom than against any other nation: Isaiah 34:5-15; Jeremiah 49:7-22; Ezekiel 25:12-14 & 35:1-15; Amos 1:11-12; Malachi 1:2-5.

## 4. Date / Historical Setting:

- a. Some have dated Obadiah to c. 850 B.C. because of the attack of the Philistines against Judah, when Edom rose up and made a king for themselves (2 Kings 8:20ff; 2 Chronicles 21:16-17).
- b. Others have even dated it much later, around 450 B.C. when various Arab tribes began to occupy Edomite territory.

- c. Majority of scholars, however, date the book of Obadiah sometime between 587 and 553 B.C. The reasons for this are: 1) Obadiah's oracle against Edom is closely related to, and a modified form of, Jeremiah's oracle against Edom (Jeremiah 49:7ff); 2) The fall of Judah and destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonians in 587 B.C.
- d. Edom is under the judgment of YHWH for plundering Israel during the Babylonian siege / attack on Jerusalem, and their abuse of the refugees in the exile from Judah / Jerusalem. See Psalm 137:7; Ezekiel 35; Amos 1:6-9.
- e. The book projects a geographical location for the author within Judah, not among the nations or the exiles. The book looks both to past events and future events.
- f. Martin Luther and John Calvin were the first to locate Obadiah after the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C., and that Obadiah was a contemporary of Jeremiah.

**5. Author:** Obadiah. Name means "servant of YHWH"

**6. Audience:**

- a. Edom in particular
- b. All nations
- c. Edom in Hebrew is closely related to Adam. Over time Edom becomes symbolic of fallen mankind set against God's will and rejecting the promise, much like Babylon becomes a symbol of the kingdoms of the world.

**7. Theological Themes:**

- a. Divine Retribution
- b. Divine Judgment
- c. The Day of YHWH
- d. The Cup of Wrath
- e. Mt. Zion
- f. Restoration and Rescue (See also: Joel 2 and 3; Amos 9:11-15)
- g. YHWH is King
- h. Christology foreshadowed

**8. Outline:**

1. Superscription (vs. 1)
2. The First Proclamation against Edom: humiliation (vs. 1-4)
3. The Second Proclamation against Edom: displacement (vs. 5-7)
4. The Third Proclamation against Edom: (vs. 8-18)
  1. Doom and accusation (vs. 8-15)
  2. Restoration for Jacob (Judah) and Destruction for Esau (Edom) (vs. 16-18)
5. Israel's Restoration and Kingship of YHWH (vs. 19-21)

## **Additional Resources:**

*Obadiah*. Paul R. Raabe. The Anchor Bible Commentary Series.

*The Word Becoming Flesh*. Horace D. Hummel. Concordia Publishing House.

*Prepare the Way of the Lord: An Introduction to the Old Testament*. Reed R. Lessing and Andrew Steinmann. Concordia Publishing House.

*Concordia's Complete Bible Handbook*. Ed. Edward A Englebrect. Concordia Publishing House.

*Lutheran Bible Companion*. Ed. Edward A Englebrect. Concordia Publishing House.

*Obadiah*. Martin Luther. American Works: Volume 18, p. 193ff. Concordia Publishing House.

## **Study Notes:**

### **Superscription and Obadiah 1-4**

1. How does the office of prophet in the OT point to Christ and his incarnation?
  1. Deuteronomy 18:18-19
  2. Philippians 2:5-11
2. Read Genesis 25:19-34; Genesis 27, Genesis 32. Numbers 20:14-20
3. In vs. 1, what do we learn about what kind of book this will be already in the first verse?
4. In vs. 1-4, how is YHWH depicted?
5. In vs. 3-4, what parallel language is used to contrast YHWH and Edom?
6. Based on the quotation from Luther below, how would we apply the prophet's words against Edom to us?

*So little can God Almighty endure our self-confidence, so much does He hate the trust of the flesh and the prideful insolence of impious hearts, that we see scattered throughout all Scripture that He calls us back from the arm of the flesh, from confidence in ourselves, to place our hope in Him. Only then, He says, will we be safe, etc.*<sup>[1]</sup>

### **Obadiah 5-7**

7. Based on the context of vs. 5-7, what will happen to Edom?
8. Who might Obadiah have in mind in referring to the “allies” in vs. 7?

### **Obadiah 8-15**

9. What does the phrase “Mount Esau” mean in this context?
10. What crimes does Obadiah accuse Edom of committing? vs. 10-14. What is the reason for the downfall of the Edomites?

Martin Luther comments on vs.

14. *And you will not stand at the parting of the ways.* The Hebrew word פִּרְקָה means two things: both “a forcible taking away” and “destruction,” as one may see in Ps. 50:22: “... lest at any time He carry you off and there be no one to snatch you away.” So also here we can understand both meanings. The sense is this: “You, O Edom, were not content with plundering your brother, with taking away his wealth from him when at My urging you were sent out with the other nations against him, but you also held back and delayed those who wished to take refuge in flight, and you delighted in killing those who were thus held back.”<sup>[2]</sup>

11. In vs. 15, to what/when does the “day of the LORD” refer?
12. What is Obadiah’s message to us as we await the Day of the LORD?

### **Obadiah 16-18**

13. What imagery of judgment is Obadiah using in vs. 16?

14. In vs. 17ff, how is Mt. Zion contrasted with Mt. Esau from earlier in the prophet's words?

15. What Good News does YHWH deliver to his people in these passages?

Luther commenting on vs. 17 says this about Zion, the Kingdom of God, and Obadiah's fulfillment in Christ: 17. *And in Mount Zion there shall be salvation.* Here begins the latter section of this prophecy. Now that the Jews have been carried off into captivity and the Edomites who mocked the Jews have in turn been destroyed, he promises another kingdom, which we can understand in no other way than as the spiritual kingdom of Christ spread among all nations through the Gospel. The Jews had been divided into two kingdoms: the kingdom of Israel, which was never again established after its destruction; and the kingdom of Judah, which was changed into the kingdom of Christ. This is an absolute essential to the understanding of those who read the prophets, whose books frequently mention these two kingdoms. It is important, then, to know that the prophet here is speaking about Christ's spiritual kingdom. The very Words force us to accept this, for when he says:

*The house of Jacob shall possess those who had possessed it,* he is indicating that the house of Jacob would recover and extend its kingdom for itself and would reduce to subjects those under whose dominion it had suffered before. This is the meaning of the Hebrew word (שָׁרַף), which our translator rendered "possess" but which he did not render with the force of the Hebrew word. For it more properly signifies what the Germans call *einnehmen*. So this magnificent word can fit neither the external kingdom of Judah nor the Israelites, for the kingdom of Israel was never destined for restoration—as is quite clear from the sacred accounts. That contradiction, therefore, forces us to understand that this is Christ's spiritual kingdom, that from the people of Israel the apostles and other disciples of Christ would come who were going to make subject to themselves the whole world by a new preaching of the Gospel and thus were going to establish a new and eternal kingdom. This is why he says that in Mount Zion there would be an escape, or a new salvation, that is, that from Zion there would come forth the sort of preaching which, if believed, would free one from death, sin, and hell. This preaching would come first from Zion, as Is. 2:3 says: "For out of Zion shall go forth the Law, and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem"; and Joel 2:32: "In Jerusalem there will be salvation."

*And it shall be holy.* That is, the nations will no longer be able to corrupt it, as had happened before. [\[3\]](#)

16. What metaphorical/symbolic language does Obadiah use to describe Judah's rescue and Edom's destruction (vs. 18)? Where else in Scripture do we find a similar use of symbolic language?

### Obadiah 19-21

17. In vs. 19-20, what kind of possession of the land is the Lord promising through the words of Obadiah, a temporal or a spiritual?

Consider Luther's words on these two verses:

*And those who live toward the south shall possess, etc.* Here we have a strange contradiction if you take this literally, to mean some external kingdom. First he says they will take possession of; then,

they will be possessed. The kingdom of Israel had been divided into twelve tribes and had been carefully cautioned by the law of Moses not to mix the tribes, as one can see in Moses. But since he here plainly says that those of the Negeb—that is, those who live to the south—will take possession of Mount Esau, etc., we must take this to mean something completely different from the literal sense. The sense, then, is this: The Christian apostles and other disciples who are going to live toward the south on Mount Zion, where the Gospel is preached first—these men, I say, will with their preaching produce fruit among the Edomites.

*And those of the plains* (more accurately, the low places, the pleasant valleys amid the mountains, *die Gründe*) *will possess the Philistines*. This is something that never actually occurred after the Babylonian captivity, for even the entire kingdom was unable to overpower and subject the Philistines. We must, then, take this as a reference to that spiritual subjection through the Gospel.

*Ephraim*. This, too, is contrary to the Law. This happened, therefore, through the apostles when they went into Samaria to preach the Gospel. What follows this is also quite similar.

*Benjamin shall possess Gilead*. Benjamin is on the west side of the Jordan, but Gilead is on the other side, in the tribe of Gad. Necessity compels us, then, to relate all of these references to the preaching of the Gospel.<sup>[4]</sup>

18. In these closing verses three actions are foretold: 1) possession of the full extent of the land; 2) deliverers will ascend to Mt. Zion to judge Edom; 3) YHWH will rule as King.

1. Why is it important to keep the context of vs. 15 in mind when reading these last few verses?
2. How do these three prophecies of Obadiah point to Christ and find their fulfillment in Jesus' work?

19. In Israel's history, who were the "saviors" (aka, deliverers, or judges)? How do they point to Christ and his deliverance?

Luther on vs. 21: *Savior shall go up*. He calls leaders "saviors," as we find in the Book of Judges (Judg. 3:9), where He sent them many saviors, that is, leaders to lead them and take charge of them, to be in the lead if they ever had to fight with enemies. So here the apostles and other disciples are called "saviors," men who by preaching that joyful Gospel message have certainly freed them from all the assaults of Satan and from the gates of hell; men who have judged them in faith, who have ruled them with just judgment, and thus have prepared the eternal kingdom for the Lord.<sup>[5]</sup>

20. Throughout the OT, Israel struggles with wanting a king, and then living under a king; the kings in turn struggle with remaining faithful to YHWH while many follow their own selfish, sinful desires.

1. Why did YHWH not want Israel to have a king like the other nations?
2. Despite their sin, how do the kings of Israel point forward to Jesus?
3. How does Jesus fulfill Obadiah's words *the kingship will belong to YHWH*?

Read: Matthew 2:1-12; Matthew 4:12-17; Matthew 6:10; the parables of Matthew 13; Matthew 21:1-11; Matthew 27:32-44; Matthew 28:18-20; Revelation 5; Philippians 2:5-11; Colossians 1:15-20

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<sup>[1]</sup> Luther, M. (1999). *Luther's works, vol. 18: Minor Prophets I: Hosea-Malachi*. (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, & H. T. Lehmann, Eds.) (Vol. 18, p. 196). Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House.

<sup>[2]</sup> Luther, M. (1999). *Luther's works, vol. 18: Minor Prophets I: Hosea-Malachi*. (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, & H. T. Lehmann, Eds.) (Vol. 18, pp. 199–200). Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House.

<sup>[3]</sup> Luther, M. (1999). *Luther's works, vol. 18: Minor Prophets I: Hosea-Malachi*. (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, & H. T. Lehmann, Eds.) (Vol. 18, pp. 200–201). Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House.

<sup>[4]</sup> Luther, M. (1999). *Luther's works, vol. 18: Minor Prophets I: Hosea-Malachi*. (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, & H. T. Lehmann, Eds.) (Vol. 18, pp. 202–203). Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House.

<sup>[5]</sup> Luther, M. (1999). *Luther's works, vol. 18: Minor Prophets I: Hosea-Malachi*. (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, & H. T. Lehmann, Eds.) (Vol. 18, p. 204). Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House.