

Obadiah

1. Introduction – Obadiah is the shortest book in the Old Testament, consisting of only 21 verses in a single chapter. In a small package, Obadiah pronounces God's judgment upon Edom for their unjust treatment of God's chosen nation Israel.
2. Author, date, historical setting – At least a dozen Obadias are mentioned in the Old Testament outside the book of Obadiah; however, none of them appear to be the author of this book. Nothing other than authorship is revealed about Obadiah in his little book. A few scholars date the book in the 9th century B.C., based primarily on the order in which the book appears in the canon among the twelve minor prophets. The books are indeed in chronological order wherever we can verify it. However, the books that are not clear in their chronology appear to be grouped by similar theme and vocabulary. Furthermore, the Septuagint puts these books in a different order from the Hebrew text.

Most scholars date the book in the 6th century B.C. after the Judean exile. This dating is based primarily on the condemnation of Edom in vv. 11-16 for raiding Judah when Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians. This event is also mentioned in other places (Ps. 137:7, Lam. 4:21-22, and the apocryphal book 1 Esdras 4:45). The Edomites were descended from Esau. From the moment of their birth, Jacob and Esau had been in conflict. This carried through to the Exodus, when the Edomites refused to allow Israel to pass through their territory on the way to Canaan (Num. 20:14-21). Israel had often subdued and ruled over Edom, but Edom had sometimes thrown off this yoke and raided Israel. During the reign of Ahaz (mid-8th century B.C.), Edom had thrown off Israelite control for the last time. Apparently, when Jerusalem fell, the Edomites either cooperated with Babylon or took advantage of the opportunity to stage their own raids against Judah. This event is the context into which Obadiah speaks.

3. Structure and literary observations – Many different structures have been proposed for Obadiah, but none of them seems to have any consensus support. Scholars have noted a significant literary link between Obadiah 1-9 and Jeremiah 49:7-16. It appears that one author was heavily influenced by the other in their composition; however, it is unclear which one depends on the other.
4. Themes:
 - a. God is the God of all nations and will hold them all to account.
 - b. God remembers his covenant with Abraham. The nations will be blessed or cursed as they relate to the people of God. Jesus echoed the same theme on a more personal level: "He who is not with me is against me" and "And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward."
 - c. Consider the sobering consequences of turning one's back on God's blessing when it is offered. Esau despised the blessing and turned his back on the covenant with Abraham. As a result, his offspring became long-term enemies of the people of God and were ultimately destroyed.
 - d. Consider the sobering consequences when God's people do evil to those around them. Jacob's deception provoked Esau to become his enemy, which was a thorn in the side of Jacob's descendants for centuries.
 - e. Consider the glory of God's sovereign election: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." (Mal. 1:2-3) This choice worked its way out both in their personal lives and in their offspring.
 - f. The conflict between Israel and Edom foreshadows the attempt by Herod, an Idumean and descendant of Esau, to destroy the true Israelite, Jesus, at his birth. (Matt. 2:16)

Reference:

An Introduction to the Old Testament, R. B. Dillard and T. Longman III, Zondervan, 1994.