

## OBADIAH

Among the somewhat obscure books of the Bible is **Obadiah**, the fourth book of the so-called "**Minor Prophets**". It is the shortest book in the Old Testament containing one chapter of only 21 verses.

The purpose of Obadiah's prophecy was to pronounce God's judgment against the Edomites, ancient enemies of the nation of Israel.

In a brief introduction, the author makes it clear that he has received this message directly from God in a vision (vs.1). The Lord has announced that He will destroy the Edomites because they have sinned against Israel. They mocked God's Covenant People in their hour of despair and even participated in the destruction and looting of the capital city, Jerusalem, when it fell to a foreign power (vss.13-14). Because of this great sin, Edom will be destroyed. But Israel will be blessed by God and restored to its native land.

His prophecy can be dated with some degree of certainty. Most scholars believe the great humiliation of Israel which the prophet mentions was the siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, beginning in 605 BC and ending with its final destruction in 586 BC. If it is this to which he is referring, the book must have been written shortly after the fall of the city, perhaps while the Israelites were still in Captivity in Babylon.

This book's condemnation of the Edomites is understandable when we consider the bitter feelings that

had always existed between these two nations. It began centuries earlier when the twin brothers, Jacob and Esau, went their separate ways (Gen 27; 36). Esau's descendants settled south of the Dead Sea and became known as the Edomites. Jacob's descendants settled farther north, eventually developing into the Covenant People known as the nation of Israel. The Bible reports many clashes between these two factions.

One notable example was the refusal of the Edomites to let the Israelites cross their land as they traveled toward the land of Canaan (Num 20:14-21). But the final insult to Israel must have been Edom's participation in the looting of Jerusalem after the city fell to the Babylonians. This led the prophet Obadiah to declare, "*For your violence against your brother Jacob, shame shall cover you, and you shall be cut off forever*" (v. 10).

The Book of Obadiah makes it clear that God takes His promises to His Covenant People seriously. He declared in the Book of Genesis that He would bless the rest of the world through Abraham and his descendants. He also promised to protect His special people against any who would try to do them harm (Gen 12:1-3). This promise is affirmed in the Book of Obadiah. God is determined to keep His promises to His people, in spite of their unworthiness and disobedience.

Verses 1:1-9 of Obadiah and Jeremiah 49:7-22 express essentially the same idea. Many of the words and phrases in these two passages are exactly alike. Some scholars believe Jeremiah drew from the Obadiah passage to emphasize God's impending judgment on Edom. If this is true, it indicates the little Book of Obadiah was taken

seriously by Jeremiah, one of the great prophetic figures in Israel's history.

### **KEY FIGURES IN THE BOOK OF OBEDIAH**

**OBEDIAH** - The fourth of the "minor" prophets. His name means "Servant of Jehovah." He lived during a time of trouble for Jerusalem. His prophecy against Edom condemned the Edomites for taking sides against Jerusalem in its distress (verse 15). The strongest mountain fortresses would be no defense for the Edomites against the day of the Lord or the time when God would bring His final judgment upon the world.

**EDOMITES** - Descendants of Esau the Edomites were an ancient people who were enemies of the Israelites.

**THE HOUSE OF JACOB** - Also referred to as "Children of Judah, My people, The house of Joseph, The children of Israel, The captives of Jerusalem", Descendants of Jacob (Lev 23:42-43). They were considered to be children of the covenant, faithful servants of the Lord, and heirs to the promises made to Abraham (Rom 9:4; 11:1). Also called **Hebrews or Jews**, it refers to God's chosen people the descendants of Abraham.

**KEY VERSE IN OBADIAH** - *"For the day of the LORD upon all the nations is near; As you have done, it shall be done to you" (Verse 15).*