**Obadiah Commentary**

**Obadiah Chapter 1**

Oba 1:1

**“The vision of Obadiah.”** “Obadiah” is a fairly common name, and means “One who serves [or worships] God.” So Obadiah got his revelation about Edom in a vision, but exactly what that vision was is not revealed. Sometimes an angel appeared with a message, sometimes Yahweh Himself did. We are not told how the vision came, which by default puts more emphasis on what is in the vision than how the vision came. No matter how the vision came, the content was from Yahweh Himself, as Obadiah 1:1 states.

**“Yahweh says concerning Edom.”** Although an envoy went to the nations, he did not go with the contents of the book of Obadiah, he went to rally troops against Edom as we see by the message itself here in Obadiah 1:1. What Yahweh said concerning Edom was a message to the people of Judah; a message of encouragement to God’s people that God sees the evil they endure and will eventually punish the evildoers. Obadiah 1:1 has the only use of “Yahweh” in the book.

**“envoy.”** A messenger, usually on a diplomatic mission.

**“Rise up! And let’s rise up against her in battle.”** That is, rise up against Edom in battle, and the double use of “rise up” is emphatic and lends to the urgency of the situation. The message in this sentence, and continuing through Obadiah 1:4, is largely also stated in Jeremiah 49:14-16. This adds support that Obadiah was contemporary with at least some of Jeremiah’s life, and the time Edom attacked Judah was during or just after the Babylonians attacked. The “let’s” shows that Judah would participate somehow in getting vengeance on her enemies, but exactly how is not clear.

Oba 1:2

**“I will make...you will be.”** The text uses the prophetic idiom for “will make” (the Hebrew verb is past tense), and the participle verb in “You will be” follows suit. The events referred to are future. A number of English versions represent the verb as future to help the English reader who may not be familiar with the Semitic idiom; the NET text note refers to this idiom as the “perfect of certitude” (cf. CSB, ESV, NASB, NET, NIV, NKJV, NLT, NRSV, RSV).

[For more on the prophetic perfect idiom, see commentary on Eph. 2:6.]

**“You will be greatly despised.”** Or “you will be held in great contempt” (cf. NJB). This indicates that Edom would become insignificant among the nations. Indeed, it has disappeared and no longer exists as a nation or people group.

Oba 1:3

**“The pride of your heart has deceived you.”** In Hebrew, the noun usually follows the verb, but in this case, the pride of the heart precedes the verb, taking an emphatic position in the sentence and thus showing us that the dominant sin of Edom was pride, and their pride led to other sins and faults.

**“you who dwell in the clefts of the rock.”** Edom was very mountainous and very tough terrain, and that gave the Edomites a false sense of security. They may boast that no one can bring them down from their lofty position, but God can, and did, make sure that happened. In that sense, Edom is a type of all the proud enemies of God, who exalt themselves and think that disaster will never happen to them. But even if one of those enemies lives a long life and exercises ungodly power over other people, in the resurrection they will be pulled up out of the grave, judged for their ungodly actions, and thrown into the Lake of Fire where they will burn until they are completely consumed.

[For more on people being consumed in the Lake of Fire and not living there forever, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

Oba 1:4

**“soar high like the eagle.”** The Hebrew is not completely clear, and basically just has “go high like the eagle,” so the scholars are divided, as we can see from the English versions. Some versions read “soar high,” and some, tying the two halves of the verse together, have “build your nest high.” The point is that no matter how high the Edomites could go, even to the stars, Yahweh can bring them down. There is no point in exalting yourself above God or ignoring and defying the commands of God. The Day of Judgment will come, and there is no safety or security except in Yahweh.

Oba 1:5

**“would not they leave some gleanings *among the* grapes?”** The Law of Moses commanded that when things were harvested that there be some left in the field or on the vine for the poor to glean (Lev. 19:9; 23:22). The two illustrations; the thieves and the grape gatherers, would not take everything but would leave some things behind, but in contrast, when Edom is attacked it will be picked clean and nothing will be left.

Oba 1:6

**“Esau.”** Esau was the oldest son of Isaac and Rebekah and twin brother of Jacob (Esau came out of the womb before Jacob). “Esau” means “hairy,” and Esau was born with a lot of hair, and he was also called “Edom” (red) because his skin was reddish (Gen. 25:25). Isaac prophesied about where Esau would live: “Behold, away from the fatness of the earth will be your dwelling-place, and away from the dew of heaven from above (Gen. 27:39). True to the prophecy, Esau moved to the area that became known as Edom, and founded that country, and it is indeed “far from the fatness of the earth.” However, as undesirable as the area of Edom is, Obadiah foretold the area would be ransacked. The fact that Edom had “hidden treasures” is historically accurate because Edom had loads of caves and places where loot that was captured on raids and other valuables could be hidden, but Yahweh says those hiding places will be discovered and Edom will itself be looted.

There is an interesting parallel in Obadiah 1:6 to people on the Day of Judgment. In a time of God’s judgment, people’s hidden physical treasures will be sought out, but on the Day of Judgment, the secrets of people’s hearts will be sought out and revealed (Luke 8:17; 2 Cor. 5:10).

Oba 1:7

**“to your border.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “to the border,” but it refers to the border of Edom, thus their own border. The men from allied nations who were supposed to help the Edomites ended up turning against them and driving them out of Edom, right to the border of Edom and then into foreign territory, where they would be easy prey for enemy armies.

**“All the men with whom you have made a covenant.”** Literally, “all the men of your covenant.” These men were supposed allies, and many English versions read “allies,” but covenants were strong and sacred in the ancient Near East, and breaking one was almost unthinkable and would certainly lead to a feud. But here even the people that the Edomites cut a covenant with turned against them. When God’s blessing is off a nation evil people reveal their selfish and evil nature.

**“have deceived you and prevailed against you.”** The Hebrew is the past tense, but it has a future meaning as well (the prophetic perfect idiom).

**“There is no understanding in him.”** The idea of “him” seems to be a collective singular for Edom, just as countries are sometimes called “she.” Edom had no understanding. This is connected to Obadiah 1:8, where the men of understanding were gone.

Oba 1:8

**“and understanding from the mountain of Esau.”** Understanding itself will be taken from Edom.

Oba 1:9

**“And your warriors.”** Once the warriors are dead, the rest of the population will be killed easily.

**“Teman.”** Teman is the name of a major city in northern Edom, as well as the name of a northern district in Edom. Although “Teman” does apply to the city here in Obadiah 1:9, the wider application is that “Teman” is being used as another name for Edom, as we see by the parallel in the last half of the verse. It is very common in the Bible to use a major city when meaning the country that the city resides in. Israel is often called “Samaria,” Syria is sometimes called “Damascus,” Judah is sometimes referred to as “Jerusalem,” etc.

Oba 1:10

**“to your brother Jacob.”** Jacob and Esau were the twin sons of Isaac and Rebekah, and historical memories are very long in the biblical world. God would not let Israel attack Edom when they came out of Egypt and Edom should have shown kindness to Israel. But Edom turned to idols, and Satan, the god behind idols, hates God and His people.

Oba 1:11

**“In the day that you stood aloof.”** This may refer to when Judah was being attacked and burned by the Babylonians, Edom should have been there to help. Instead, they were “like one of them,” the foreign invaders. Because of the last phrase, J. A. Thompson has suggested that the opening phrase should be “In the day that you stood in opposition.”[[1]](#footnote-16333) Actually, in standing aloof, Edom did stand in opposition to Judah and was like the invaders. However, Obadiah may be earlier, for example when Judah had been attacked by the Philistines and Arabs (2 Chron. 21:16-17). The revolt of Edom was 2 Chron. 21:8).

**“strangers carried away his wealth.”** When the Babylonians invaded Judah and Jerusalem, they took people and goods (cf. 2 Kings 24:13-16; 2 Chron. 36:18).

**“and cast lots for Jerusalem.”** The conquering army would cast lots for all kinds of booty, but men and women as slaves were a prize choice. Joel 3:3 and Nahum 3:10 mention casting lots for people, which would then be slaves.

Oba 1:12

**“have gloated over.”** The Hebrew text is more literally, “looked at,” but it is used idiomatically for gloating in this context. It is looking at something with smug pleasure, or gloating.

**“spoken proudly.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “make great [or big] your mouth.” The idiom means to speak proudly or boast.

Oba 1:13

**“You should not have entered into the gate of my people.”** The Babylonian army broke down the gate of Jerusalem and entered the city. After they left, the Edomites took advantage of the situation and entered Jerusalem to take anything they wanted and to kill or enslave people who were left. God’s ire and indignation show up in Obadiah 1:13 as He calls Judah, in spite of her sin, “my people.” Edom was a blood relative of Judah and should have been helpful, instead, they take full advantage of God’s people and will suffer the consequences for it.

Oba 1:14

**“You should not have handed over his survivors.”** The Edomites blocked the way of escape for many of the Judeans who were fleeing the Babylonians. They captured the fleeing Judeans and handed them over to the Babylonians. This would have been a slave trade; capture fleeing people and sell them to the Babylonians. The word, “his” refers to those of Judah.

Oba 1:15

**“the Day of Yahweh.”** The Day of Yahweh (“the Day of the LORD”) is the period of great tribulation that will come on the earth as a consequence for all the sins that have been committed. It is a time of great tribulation. See commentary on Isaiah 13:9.

**“As you have done, it will be done to you.”** The Bible repeatedly declares that people will eventually get what they deserve. From the book of Job, believed to be one of the oldest books in the Bible, to Paul’s writings in the New Testament, the theme that God will give to people what they deserve based on their deeds is clearly set forth. The following verse from Jeremiah is a good example. Jeremiah 17:10 says, “I, Yahweh, search the heart, I test the kidneys, in order to give to every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings.” Matthew 16:27 says, “For the Son of Man is about to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each *person* according to what he has done.” Many other verses say almost the same thing (cf. Job 34:11; Ps. 62:12; Prov. 24:12; Jer. 32:19; Ezek. 33:20; Rom. 2:6; and 1 Cor. 3:8. Cp also, Luke 9:26; 1 Cor. 3:10-17; 2 Cor. 5:10; Col. 3:23-25). It is because people will get what they deserve that 1 John 2:28 says, “And now, O children, remain in him, so that when he appears, we will have confidence and not shrink back in shame from him at his coming.

[For more on people getting what they deserve, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10.]

Oba 1:16

**“For just as you drank on my holy mountain.”** Although it is not mentioned in Scripture, this no doubt refers to the Edomites drinking themselves drunk in Jerusalem, celebrating the Babylonian (and their own) victory over the Judeans.

**“the nations drink continually.”** The “cup” and drinking are often used in Hebrew literature to refer to God’s judgment and wrath. The figurative language is not expressed in the complete thought that prose is, but the idea is that Edom drank in victory, but now Edom and the nations will drink the cup of God’s wrath. They will “drink continually,” and “drink and swallow down” meaning that there will be wave after wave of God’s wrath until there is nothing left of those nations. This verse is not about personal judgment, it is about the judgment of the ungodly nations, and that they will disappear from history.

**“and they will be as though they had never been.”** The Hebrew text is unclear as to what this phrase refers to, Edom or the nations. The scholars are divided.

Oba 1:17

**“But in Mount Zion.”** It must be remembered that the context is now the Day of Yahweh, the Day of the Lord (Obad. 1:15). In Obadiah’s time Judeans did not escape, but in the Day of the Lord the tables will be turned and God’s people will escape and Mount Zion (and Jerusalem where it is located) will be holy.

**“will dispossess those who had dispossessed them.​”** The meaning of this phrase has been hotly debated. The phrase can mean “will possess their possessions,” that is, Israel will once again possess its rightful land and other possessions. However, the same Hebrew letters can be vowel-pointed to mean “dispossess those who dispossessed them.” There are valid arguments on both sides, and the correct meaning is difficult to determine. In fact, it could be that given the Hebrew text, both meanings could be correct.

Oba 1:18

**“the house of Esau *will be* for stubble.”** The house of Esau is Edom. “Stubble” is a term that was used for the cut-up stalks of grain or grass that burned very fast and hot and were used to start fires or heat an oven (cf. Isa. 5:24; Matt. 6:30), and it also referred to the cut-off stalks of grain that were left in the field after the harvest. However, it was not a custom to burn the stalks in the field, although they would sometimes catch fire due to the many campfires in the biblical culture (cf. Exod. 22:6).

**“They will burn among them, and consume them.”** That is, Judah and Israel will burn the Edomites and consume them. It is unclear when this could happen, but what is clear is that Edom would be completely consumed and not exist anymore. Edom does not exist anymore as a nation or a people group. This may be a case where “Edom” is used by a metonymy for all the evil nations, which will be consumed in the future. The most likely application of this verse is that Jesus Christ, representing all twelve tribes of Israel, will conquer the nations in the Battle of Armageddon, and then Israel and Judah will be reunited and placed in the Land of Israel (see commentary on Jer. 32:37; cf. Ezek. 47, 48).

**“there will not be a survivor to the house of Esau.”** Although it is literally true that Edom would be completely destroyed, the “house of Esau” was a lot bigger than just Edom, and even though “Esau” had been used of Edom earlier in Obadiah, here “the house of Esau” means more than just Edom and reflects the fact that eventually all the pagan nations will be completely destroyed and Yahweh will reign over the earth through His right-hand man, Jesus Christ. The fact that Jacob (Judah) and “Joseph” (Israel) would be a flame that would destroy the unbelieving and Godless nations would lead Jews to believe that when the Messiah came, he would throw off the yoke of any nations oppressing Israel and lead them in a conquest of the earth. This belief in world conquest when the Messiah came was one reason that the people did not expect Jesus to die (Matt. 16:21-23; John 12:34), and why, after he was raised from the dead, the apostles asked Jesus if he was now going to restore the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6).

Oba 1:19

**“Those of the Negev will take possession of the mountain of Esau.”** This has not happened in recorded history, but Jesus will conquer all of Israel and the surrounding territory in the Battle of Armageddon, and then the land will be given to the tribes of Israel (cf. Ezek. 47, 48).

**“the Shephelah.”** The Shephelah is the area of rolling hills east of Israel’s coastal plain and between the coastal plain and the hill country (see commentary on Josh. 9:1). It has many important cities, most of which were occupied by the Philistines at one time or another.

Oba 1:20

**“And the exiles of this army of the children of Israel will take possession of the land of the Canaanites.”** Obadiah 1:20 is considered by many scholars to be the most difficult verse in Obadiah to translate and understand, and frankly, it cannot be done without making some assumptions. The construction in the REV is similar to that in many versions (cf. CEB). For a discussion of some of the possible translations, see the Tyndale Cornerstone Biblical Commentary, Philip Comfort editor.

Even though the verse is translated in different ways in different versions, the general consensus is that Obadiah 1:20 is about the return of the Israelites to the land that God promised them. Over the centuries, Israel and Judah have been scattered from the Promised Land, but in the Millennial Kingdom, they will return and be given the land (cf. Jer. 32:37; Ezek. 47, 48).

**“as far as Zarephath.”** Zarephath was just south of Sidon (1 Kings 17:9) and so that Israel would take possession of the land of Israel as far as Sidon fulfills what Joshua assigned to the tribe of Asher, thus restoring the northern border of the Promised Land (Josh. 19:28). Zarephath was the place where Yahweh sent Elijah when he lived with the widow and the oil and bread she had was multiplied and sustained her family (1 Kings 17:8-16; Luke 4:26).

**“who are in Sepharad.”** The location of Sepharad is unknown. Scholars have made various educated guesses, but in the end, they are just guesses. The location is unknown, but it does seem to be far away from the Negev.

**“will take possession of the cities of the Negev.”** Just as in the first part of the verse the Israelites take possession of the northern border of the land of Israel, in the last part of the verse the Israelites take possession of the southern border of Israel in the Negev.

Oba 1:21

**“And saviors will go up on Mount Zion.”** In the Millennial Kingdom, “saviors,” will go to the top of Mount Zion where the Temple of God and the palace of Jesus Christ are, and they will judge the “mountains of Esau,” which not only refers to the people of the area of Edom, but also refers in a wider sense to the nations of the world. Of course, the unspoken Savior of saviors, the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, will be the king and chief savior on Mount Zion. He is not specifically mentioned in this verse, but he is in many other verses.

[For more on people assigned to be judges in the Millennial Kingdom, see commentary on Jer. 23:4. For more on Christ’s Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

1. Billy Smith and Frank Page, Amos, Obadiah, Johah [NAC], 192. [↑](#footnote-ref-16333)