

Obadiah

Introduction

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Why read this book?

Has anyone ever taken advantage of you—and gotten away with it? Perhaps a friend or maybe even a family member turned on you when you needed them. Obadiah tells us that God will take care of such injustices.

Who wrote this book?

Obadiah, an otherwise unknown prophet, whose name means *servant of the Lord*.

When was it written?

Perhaps between 850 and 732 B.C., but more likely between 605 and 587 B.C.

What was happening in the world at this time?

God's people had a longstanding feud with Edom, a neighboring nation of distant blood relatives. When Judah was invaded and conquered by Babylon, Edom not only cheered and gloated, they also looted Judah in the aftermath. They even captured those who tried to escape and turned them over to the enemy.

Why was it written?

To condemn the Edomites' treachery and arrogance and declare God's eventual punishment for their crimes against his people.

What to look for in Obadiah:

Watch for God's loyalty to his people—evidenced by the judgment he pronounces against those who defy him by opposing his people.

—*From the Quest Study Bible (Zondervan)*



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Leader's Guide

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How God deals with pride

In the introduction to this study series on the Minor Prophets we asked, "When did you last read Obadiah?" Sometimes we think, What message could we possibly find for today in a book like Obadiah? The Book of Obadiah has only 21 verses, and the theme of the book is the denunciation of Edom. In this study, we'll see why that matters to us.

Scripture: Obadiah

Based On: "The Minor Prophets: God Still Speaks to Us Today," by Tom Cowan

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Part 1 Identify the Issue

James Montgomery Boice says of Obadiah:

Of the twelve books of the Minor Prophets the most “minor” of all is Obadiah. Minor does not mean unimportant, of course; it refers only to length. But by this standard . . . Obadiah is noteworthy, for it is by far the shortest book not only of the twelve Minor Prophets but of the whole Old Testament. It has one chapter, and that contains only twenty-one verses. Moreover, we know very little about it. Although the Old Testament mentions at least twelve individuals called Obadiah, none is to be identified with the prophet. There is also uncertainty regarding when the book was written.

The book is “minor” in another way as well: in terms of most people’s knowledge of it. Who knows what is in Obadiah? Very few, even among conscientious Bible students. Yet the book has a major message for our and every other age.¹

The theme of this short book is the denunciation and downfall of a nation as a result of pride. It bears out Proverbs 16:18: “Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.”

[Q] Think about recent news stories. How has Proverbs 16:18 played itself out?

[Q] Have you ever experienced this proverb in your own life? If so, how?

Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching Point One: Edom had a lot to be proud of.

It is important for us to know about Edom if we are going to understand the message of this book. The name “Edom” means red. It was the name given to Jacob’s brother, Esau, because he sold his birthright for Jacob’s meal of red stew (see Genesis 25:30). This struggle between twin brothers trickled down to their descendants. Obadiah condemns the Edomites for not coming to the aid of, or acting like a brother to, Israel.

Edom is also known in the Bible as Seir, Hor, and Esau. The real importance of Edom was due to two factors. First of all, it was situated along the great trade routes between Egypt and Syria, and would bring in much profit from this trade. People grew rich on the tolls extracted from caravans. The second factor was Edom’s natural strength and security, which was due to its location. Red sandstone cliffs rose more than 5,000 feet above sea level. They could be

¹ James Montgomery Boice, *The Minor Prophets* (Baker Books, 2006).

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easily fortified. As a result, the people of Edom found it easy to become rich, wage war on other nations, and feel relatively secure. Their setting was a response to a time when the city of Jerusalem was overrun by foreign armies, a defeat in which the Edomites collaborated. As is often the case with human nature, they were feeling proud and smug, especially in the security of their own situation. But remember what the old proverb says: "Pride comes before a fall."

Read Obadiah.

[Q] Verses 1–9 record Edom's fall. What is the root of their sin (v. 3)?

[Q] How does verse 3 describe their physical setting? What kind of attitude would this create in the people?

[Q] What is the significance of the reference to a brother (v. 12)?

[Q] In verse 15 we read again this phrase that is so characteristic of the prophets: "The Day of the Lord." What does this phrase mean?

Leader's Note: In both the Old and New Testaments, the Day of the Lord refers to God's final judgment of nations and individuals.

Teaching Point Two: Pride comes before judgment and a fall.

The root of pride often lies in the idea that we can do without God. Boice says, "On the personal level we can imagine that we can do without God in our family life, our business, or in regard to our health, or in a dozen other areas. On the national level, pride often expresses itself in the characteristic boasts of Edom."

As you read through Obadiah, you will find at least three different areas of the Edomites' pride:

- 1) Their physical setting and the safety it afforded them (v. 3)
- 2) Their allies and the help that they expected to get from them (v. 7)
- 3) Their wisdom (v. 8).

In the Book of Job, one of Job's friends and the chief representative of wisdom in the dialogue was a man called Eliphaz. He came from Edom.

[Q] How would you summarize what verses 15 and 16 say?

[Q] What will happen to the house of Esau (v. 18)?

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[Q] The book opened with Edom feeling proud and secure. How has this changed (vv. 19–21)?

[Q] What are we proud of today? What are some of the ways in which pride is expressed today at both a national level and a personal level?

Optional Activity:

Purpose: *To reinforce the truth that pride comes before a fall.*

Activity: *As a group, page through a few copies of last week's newspapers or news magazines. Cut out headlines or stories that reflect the proverb "Pride comes before a fall." Paste or pin them to a poster board. Discuss: What contributed to the pride in these situations? What makes us immune to these kinds of consequences? Read Proverbs 16:18 and 1 Corinthians 10:12. Take a moment, individually, to write down personal issues of pride on index cards. Use it as a time of confession before the Lord.*

Part 3 Apply Your Findings

We need to see the essential message of the book, which is a warning against an attitude of pride. Pride *does* come before a fall. In his commentary on Obadiah, Boice writes:

Today on television and in the newspapers we hear and read much about the ability of this country and its leaders to handle the political and other problems of this world. The thought is that we are able. We are adequate for whatever circumstances history may bring. But we are not able. We cannot solve this world's problems.²

[Q] What about our country? Will God judge us? If so, what do you think he will judge?

[Q] What spiritual lessons do you find in Obadiah that can be applied to us today?

Action Point: *On your own this week, read Romans 13 to gain perspective on praying for those who lead our country and for instruction on what God expects of us. This is the antidote to pride: a spirit of repentance and humility. What difference would it make to individuals and our country if we acted on the instruction in this chapter? Take time alone this week to pray and repent before the Lord.*

—*Study by Tom Cowan, with Kyle White*

² James Montgomery Boice, *The Minor Prophets* (Baker Books, 2006).