

OBADIAH

MINOR PROPHETS SERIES

The Edomites were a people filled with pride who thought they were invincible. Their arrogance and their hatred of God's people led them to increasing acts of violence. God promised that they would reap what they had sowed and they would be destroyed. History tells us that this did take place and the Edomites ceased to exist as a people.

In our last lesson we began to look at the “day of the Lord” which could be a time of judgement and punishment or a time of redemption. For the Edomites, and all other nations who act unjustly, judgment and destruction are coming. For God's people the “day of the Lord” means redemption.

I. What is meant by “the day of the Lord?”

The Expanding Kingdom

Verses 19-21 describe an expanding Kingdom. In verse 18, Jacob and Joseph represented the Southern and Northern Kingdoms and together the entire covenant community of God. Opposed to God's people is the house of Esau who is representative of all those who oppose God and his people.

As in the previous lesson (verses 15-18), this is a prophecy that takes place spiritually in the messianic age.



A number of locations are listed in verses 19-20:

1. The Negev was a desert region in the south of Judah
2. Mount Esau is another description of the country of Edom located in the mountainous region between the Dead Sea and the Gulf of Aquaba.
3. The Shephelah was located on the plateau between the Judean mountains and the coastal plain. It was an area of conflict between Israel and the Philistines.
4. The Philistines were located on the coastal plain of Israel.
5. The territory of Ephraim was directly north of Judah and in New Testament times encompassed Samaria and Galilee. It sometimes was used to refer to the Northern Kingdom. Samaria was its capital.
6. Benjamin was a part of the southern kingdom. It extended from the Jordan River near Jericho and was only about 15km from north to south.
7. Gilead was located east of the Jordan River across from Benjamin and in the time of Obadiah was a part of the northern kingdom.

8. The Canaanites describe the Phoenicians
9. Zarephath was a city located between Tyre and Sidon.
10. Sepharad was in an unknown location.

Partial and Ultimate Fulfilment

The fulfilment of the prophecy found in Obadiah is seen partially completed in destruction of Edom. The Babylonians invade around 600 B.C., in the fourth century B.C. the Nabateans invade forcing the Edomites south of Judah (Idumea). In the second century B.C., the Maccabeans killed twenty thousand Edomites and brought them into subjection. John Hyrcanus forced the remaining Edomites to accept circumcision and the Law.¹ Josephus records how Simon of Gerasa attached Idumea, ravaged the land, laid waste to the country, and decimated the entire population with any who remained being absorbed into surrounding communities.²

The ultimate fulfilment came figuratively or spiritually as this prophecy looks forward to the conquest by spiritual Israel; the people of Mount Zion; the church. God's Kingdom rapidly expanded in every direction as the Gospel was preached and men and women obeyed Christ and became a part of the Kingdom of God.

2. Why are all the territories mentioned located near or bordering Judah or Israel?"

God's covenant people are described in these verses as the Negev (Judah), the Sephelah, Benjamin, and as exiles. Those in exile could be those enslaved in or before the days of Obadiah, or he was looking forward to the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities.

The conquest of the territories in verses 19-20 describes the expansion of the kingdom in every direction. Judah (the Negev) and Benjamin stand as symbols of the kingdom people of God, people who will possess the Promised Land. Though some small part of this expansion may have happened physically, the Jews never did fully possess the entire Promised Land. This prophecy goes even farther saying that God's people will possess not only the Promised Land, but also the land of Edom which was never part of the land of promise.

3. If the prophecy to possess all these lands did not take place physically does this mean the prophecy was unfulfilled? Explain.

Numbers 24:17-18 provides an example of a prophecy being fulfilled figuratively or spiritually: *"I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: a star shall come out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel; it shall crush the forehead of Moab and break down all the sons of Sheth. Edom shall be dispossessed; Seir also, his enemies, shall be dispossessed. Israel is doing valiantly."*

¹ http://executableoutlines.com/mp/mp_02.htm

² Butler, Paul T. *The Minor Prophets*. Joplin, Missouri: College Press, 1968, p. 136.

4. What person could be described as a star coming out of Jacob and a sceptre out of Israel?

5. What does a star and a sceptre represent?

The “star” coming out of Jacob as well as the “sceptre” clearly refers to Christ. Here Edom (also called Seir) is disposed by this one. The Lord’s Kingdom is not a physical kingdom, so this prophecy is fulfilled spiritually as the Gospel of Christ spreads through the Gentile lands.

The prophecy of Obadiah was fulfilled as these Gentile lands are conquered for Christ through the message of the Gospel. Philip the evangelist carried the Good News to the coastal areas of Judea in the former lands of the Philistines and in Samaria. Jesus had a successful ministry in Galilee and some of his most faithful disciples were found there.³

Sometimes it is hard for us to understand how Old Testament prophecy is fulfilled. For instance James says that Amos 9:11-12 was fulfilled in Acts 15:16-17 when the Gentiles were welcomed into the church without having to obey Jewish law.

Notice that James clearly recognises the inclusion of the Gentiles into the church to be the fulfilment of the words in Amos where the Jews will possess the remnant of Edom as well as all the nations who are called by the Lord’s name.

Amos 9:11-12

11 “In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old,
12 that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name,” declares the Lord who does this.

Acts 15:12-17

12 And all the assembly fell silent, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. 13 After they finished speaking, James replied, “Brothers, listen to me. 14 Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name. 15 And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written,

16 “‘After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, 17 that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name,’ says the Lord, who makes these things 18 known from of old.”

While God’s people were on the defensive in the early verses of Obadiah, now they are on the offensive. Six times the word “possess” is used showing an expansion of the Kingdom of God into new territory. We remember that Jesus told Peter that the “gates of hell shall not prevail against” the church.⁴

³ Smith, James E. *Obadiah, Joel, Jonah, Micah: A Christian Interpretation*. (James E. Smith, 2011), 44-45.

⁴ Matt. 16:18.

6. In what ways is the church to be on an offensive mission?

The use of the word “saviours” in verse 21 is the same word used for judges such as Samuel and Samson. Throughout history God has used men to lead is people spiritually and to share his message of deliverance. Each one who provides deliverance does so at Mount Zion (a spiritual name for the southeastern hill of Jerusalem and a symbolic reference to the the dwelling place of the covenant people of God.)

The closing phrase, “and the kingdom shall be the Lord’s” teaches that God will ultimately be victorious. This is the same as an accomplished fact. The Psalmist declares in Psalm 22:28, “For kingship belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations.”

“This is the bottom line of all history. The struggles between Mount Zion and Mount Esau, the world and the church, fade from the prophet’s view. He sees the kingdom of Yahweh ultimately triumphant, surviving all the powers which have tried to destroy her. These words are the polar star to guide God’s people through whatever dark days may arise.”⁵

Lessons from Obadiah

We remember that these words were written first to a certain people at a certain time. While the Edomites are addressed throughout, the message was to the Jewish people who were suffering mightily at the hands of their enemies. The primary lesson is what we find throughout Scripture: God’s people may endure great persecution, but the “Day of the Lord” will come and all wrongs will be righted. The evil will be punished and God’s faithful will find reward.

Additional lessons and application

1. The Edomites (representative of all those opposed to God) were a prideful and arrogant people. They placed their pride in their location, wealth, friends/allies, wisdom, and military. Those opposed to God foolishly place their faith in these areas.
2. The Edomites were a violent people. At first they stood aloof, then they gloated, next they rejoiced and boasted in Jacobs distress, and then they actively harmed God’s people. Violent actions are progressive and find their origin in a prideful and arrogant heart that is set against God.
3. God sees all and in a “day” that is “near” he will act punishing the wicked and vindicating his people who dwell in Mount Zion. (Today Mount Zion is the church).
4. God’s Kingdom will expand as the Gospel is preached and both Jews and Gentiles are added to the Kingdom as they obey Christ. The ultimate victory is assured. The kingdom shall be the Lord’s!

⁵ Smith, *ibid.* p. 48.