

Seven Bible Studies 2017

Prophecy

September 29: Obadiah (John Morris)

Reading for September 29, 2017

Obadiah

Obadiah is one of only five one-chapter books in the Bible, making it the most minor of the Minor Prophets (so named for their length). Of those five, it is the only one in the Old Testament. Without looking, what are the other four? =)

THE MAN, OBADIAH

Of the man, we know nothing certain, except that he was a prophet of God. There are 13 other men in the Old Testament with his name, but none can be conclusively identified with him.

THE TIME OF OBADIAH

The date of the book cannot be nailed down conclusively, either. Obadiah mentions a sack of Jerusalem (vs. 11), which helps a little. We know of at least four biblically-recorded occasions when this took place:

- (1) By the Egyptians (1 Kings 14:25-26; 2 Chron. 12:1-12)
- (2) By the Arabians and the Philistines (2 Chron. 21:16-17)
- (3) By Israel (northern kingdom) (2 Kings 14:8-14; 2 Chron. 25:17-24)
- (4) By Babylon

How to know for sure which one Obadiah is referencing, however, presents challenges (the Jewish Massorettes (c. 500-1000 AD), interestingly, who gave us our present order of the books, placed Obadiah early in the Minor Prophets indicating they thought it had an early date. But, of course, theirs is just another opinion).

Personally, I like the idea that Obadiah was a contemporary of Jeremiah's, and prophesying against Edom around 586 BC, after Jerusalem had fallen to Babylon. I'll mention three reasons for this seeming plausible:

- (1) The similarity between Obad. 1:1 and Jer. 49:13-14 is striking
- (2) Ps. 137:7 tells us what the Edomites were saying when Jerusalem fell to Babylon: "Raze it, raze it, to its very foundation!" That fits well with Obad. 1:12-14.
- (3) God's extermination of the Gentile nations bordering Israel (e.g. Ammon, Moab, the Philistines) was much nearer in Jeremiah's day than it would have been at the earlier dates, which matches up well with Obad. 1:15-16.

THE MESSAGE OF OBADIAH

Here is something certain. Edom would fall because of her pride and violence against Israel. Her dwellings in the mountains (vs. 3-4), her money (vs. 6), her alliances (vs. 7), her wise men (vs. 8), her military (vs. 9) would not save her. There is a price to be paid when one, in bitterness, fights against the people of God.

But though Edom would be destroyed, there would be deliverance in Zion (vs. 17-21). Starting in vs. 17, we may be seeing one of those so-called “dual prophecies.” The physical nation of Israel would continue to thrive and prosper in their own land long into the future, but Edom would not (cf. Mal. 1:2-5).

In fulfillment of vs. 18, Edom would fall to Israel at the hands of the Maccabees in 185 BC, then again to the Jewish ruler and high priest John Hyrcanus about 50 years later. Finally “no survivor [would] remain of the house of Esau” after the Romans killed most of them in 70 AD (they had let 20,000 into Jerusalem before they destroyed it), and the few survivors that remained took refuge among the desert tribes, only to be absorbed into their communities and disappear from history.

In vss. 19-20, we see Israel (both physical and spiritual, perhaps) prospering.

In vs. 21, “saviors/deliverers” come to Mount Zion. Who are these saviors/deliverers? Could they be those who preached the gospel, the message of deliverance from sin and death? They certainly preached it first in Zion/Jerusalem (Ac. 2), as Isaiah may have been telling us they would: “For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (2:3). They also preached it in the church, spiritual Mount Zion (Heb. 12:22-24). Did those who preached “judge the mountains of Esau?” If “the mountains of Esau” are symbolic of God’s enemies (as Mount Zion is symbolic of the church), yes. The message of Christ judges (Is. 2:4; Heb. 4:12). So finally, with the truth proclaimed, and sinners judged by that truth, “the kingdom shall be the LORD’s” (vs. 21).

Comment:

Shelia Welte:

I have never completely understood the chronological order of Obadiah. Thank you for your explanation...that make me need to look up a couple of those passages that I am not familiar with. I am happy to say I could name the other 4 books with only 1 chapter--Philemon, 2&3 John and Jude--as we read them for Bible time as a family this summer. Guess you never know when something like that is going to come in useful :)

Comment:

Butch O’Neal

Thank you, John!

Comment:

Joanne Caffie:

The last verse uses the term 'saviours'. Can someone make this statement more clearly? Thx

Replies:

John Morris:

When someone preaches the gospel to another, and it is obeyed, the “preacher” becomes a “savior” (1 Cor. 7:16; 9:22). The “saviors” in the last verse may be the apostles who first preached the gospel in Jerusalem (see last paragraph above). Because their preaching was heeded, they were “saviors.”

John Morris:

Thinking about this more... God is “the Savior of all men, ESPECIALLY of those who believe” (1 Tim. 4:10). Whether people heed God’s call or not, He’s still their Savior.

With that biblical precedent in mind, the apostles were/are "saviors" whether their preaching was/is heeded or not.

John Morris:

How can the apostles rightly be called by a term that is applied to the Lord, Himself? I think of it this way: They were apostles and saviors. The Lord Jesus is THE Apostle (Heb. 3:1) and THE Savior (Jn. 4:42).

Joanne Caffie:

I can relate John 4:42 but not I John 3 :1

John Morris:

Joanne Caffie Oops, listed the incorrect passage. 1 Jn. 3:1 should have been Heb. 3:1. It's been corrected in the comment.

Joanne Caffie:

Now I c... 😊

Charles Fry:

The Hebrew word for "saviors" ("deliverers" NIV) was applied to Moses ("came to their rescue")

Exodus 2:17 (NIV)

17 Some shepherds came along and drove them away, but Moses got up and came to their rescue and watered their flock.

And to Israel (Joshua 10:6, "save us"), and to the judges of Israel (Judges 3:9, 15, for example, many similar references), and to Saul (1 Sam 9:16), etc. it is used many times of the Lord, and of those people the Lord raised up to deliver/rescue/save others.