

READING

Obadiah

SERMON

RO

Who's in Control (Obadiah)

How do you arrange your bookcase?

- For some it is an aesthetic look – they do it by size or perhaps by colour
- For some it is in subject order. This could be alphabetical by author or by subject or by title or even by some other order – this is irrespective of size of colour, so it may not look as good. This is me and my books are arranged by the order of the books in the Bible, as most of them are commentaries on the Bible, but the order has a twist.
- For some people it is totally random, or at least to someone like me it appears totally random

In the Bible the basic assumption is often is the books are in chronological order, i.e. you begin at the beginning with Genesis

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” (Genesis 1:1 NIV)

and then you journey through to the end of Revelation which says

“He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen.”
(Revelation 22:20-21 NIV)

And it just so happens that Genesis is where it all begins and Revelation is where it all ends, but the books in the middle are not necessarily in any order except that the Old Testament is to do with life before Jesus and the New Testament is life with and after Jesus.

The Old and New Testament books are not arranged necessarily in chronological order, or in the order of the events they deal with, or even in order of height! Or is that length. However this evening we begin a new series looking at some books of the Bible that can be overlooked because they are short. That is what holds this series together and this evening we begin by looking at the shortest – the book of Obadiah – one of the prophets in the Old Testament, usual lumped with others and called the Minor Prophets

We have already read the book this evening, all twenty-one verses of it. So let us plunge right into the book, which is found on page 925 of the church Bibles. The problem with it being so small is that it can get lost and people never find it.

The book begins

“The vision of Obadiah...” (Obadiah 1:1 NIV)

So who was Obadiah? Obadiah means ‘Servant of God’ and just as some names are common now because of some connotation or other like being named after a footballer or pop singer, so Obadiah – Servant of God – was a popular name in Israel as parents hoped their child would grow up to be a Servant of God.

In the Bible there are thirteen or less Obadiah's mentioned. I say thirteen or less because scholars are not sure if some of the references to an Obadiah are also talking about another Obadiah which is the same as the first reference. Or of course it could be that the Obadiah we are looking at is not a name but the title 'Servant of God'. I shall be assuming it is a name. We are told nothing about this particular Obadiah, nothing about his background, his parents, which we do get with some of the other prophets

So when was the book written? Maybe we can get clues there.

- Some scholars believe Obadiah was a contemporary of Jehoram, during whose reign (about 844 BC). This is based on verses 11-14 of Obadiah

“On the day you stood aloof while strangers carried off his wealth and foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem, you were like one of them. You should not look down on your brother in the day of his misfortune, nor rejoice over the people of Judah in the day of their destruction, nor boast so much in the day of their trouble. You should not march through the gates of my people in the day of their disaster, nor look down on them in their calamity in the day of their disaster, nor seize their wealth in the day of their disaster. You should not wait at the crossroads to cut down their fugitives, nor hand over their survivors in the day of their trouble.” (Obadiah 1:11-14 NIV)

And coupling it with 2 Chronicles 21:16-17

“The LORD aroused against Jehoram the hostility of the Philistines and of the Arabs who lived near the Cushites. They attacked Judah, invaded it and carried off all the goods found in the king's palace, together with his sons and wives. Not a son was left to him except Ahaziah, the youngest.” (2 Chronicles 21:16-17 NIV)

- But then another group of scholars go for a later date following 586 BC, the time of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians.
- Still others suggest an earlier Babylonian assault on Jerusalem, in 605 BC

So it is a case of paying your money and making your choice, at least to dating of the book and the identity of the author – you cannot be hard and fast about it. So let us look at the main players.

- **Edom** – firstly we have Edom, descendants of Esau, the eldest son of Isaac and Rebekah, with Jacob, the ancestor of Israel which included Judah, the southern kingdom which was where Jerusalem was situated. The most significant area of ancient Edom was the mountain-encircled plain on the east of the Arabah. Mt. Seir, the highest of this range, rises to an elevation of nearly 1,200 meters (3,500 feet) above the Arabah. Edom's capital during the days of Israel's monarchy was Sela, situated at the southern end of a secluded valley that became the location of the city of Petra in later times.
- **Judah** – This is the southern kingdom after Israel had split and ten tribes made up the northern kingdom of Israel or Ephraim, while Judah and Benjamin became the southern kingdom of Judah.

However there had always been conflict between Edom and Israel. The conflict began with the brothers, Jacob and Esau.

- Jacob and Esau struggled in their mother's womb Genesis 25:19-26
Jacob and Esau were twin boys and we read

“When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. The first to come out was red, and his whole body was like a hairy garment; so they named him Esau (meaning *Red*). After this, his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau’s heel; so he was named Jacob (meaning *he grasps the heel*, which was an idiom for *he deceives*. Isaac was sixty years old when Rebekah gave birth to them.” (Genesis 25:24-26 NIV)

- Esau sold his birthright and blessing to Jacob Genesis 25:29-34
Jacob gets Esau to give away his birthright for a simple meal when Esau is very, very hungry – Oh for brotherly love!
- Jacob get Isaac’s blessing meant for Esau Genesis 27:1-42
The final straw when Jacob, with the help of his mother Rebekah, tricks the blind Isaac into giving the irrevocable blessing to Jacob which should have been Esau’s and so Jacob got it all and Esau none.

But then through history Edom and Israel, the descendent of Esau and Jacob were not nice to each other. I am not going to go into them but we have

- Edom refused to let the Israelites pass through its land Numbers 20:14-22
- Israel’s kings had constant conflict with Edom.
 - Saul 1 Samuel 14:47
 - David 2 Samuel 8:13-14
 - Solomon 1 Kings 11:14-22
 - Jehoram 2 Kings 8:20-22; 2 Chronicles 21:8-10
 - Ahaz 2 Chronicles 28:16-18
- Edom urged Babylon to destroy Jerusalem Psalm 137:7

So there was no love lost between Edom and Judah. But the prophecy is about the destruction of Edom, but what are their sins, what have they done wrong that God is going to destroy them?

Pride

The first of their sins was Pride. Verse 3

“The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rocks and make your home on the heights, you who say to yourself, ‘Who can bring me down to the ground?’” (Obadiah 1:3 NIV)

And when one is proud one will then boast as they did in verse 12

“You should not look down on your brother in the day of his misfortune, nor rejoice over the people of Judah in the day of their destruction, nor boast so much in the day of their trouble.” (Obadiah 1:12 NIV)

They were proud of their invincibility. They were in the mountains and warfare in the mountains was difficult when your weapons were chariots. The Edomites were proud of their wealth – some of their country laid along trade routes and so that brought wealth.

Beware of pride, because pride comes before a fall, or so the saying goes. Verse 3 again

“The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rocks and make your home on the heights, you who say to yourself, ‘Who can bring me down to the ground?’”

Then it goes on.

Though you soar like the eagle and make your nest among the stars (this is a reference to their homes being cut into the mountain rocks), from there I will bring you down," declares the LORD. "If thieves came to you, if robbers in the night— Oh, what a disaster awaits you—would they not steal only as much as they wanted? If grape pickers came to you, would they not leave a few grapes? But how Esau will be ransacked, his hidden treasures pillaged! All your allies will force you to the border; your friends will deceive and overpower you; those who eat your bread will set a trap for you, but you will not detect it." (Obadiah 1:3-7 NIV)

Beware of pride. We can rightfully be proud of what God has done for us. We can rightfully be proud of the fact that God loves us, loves us enough to die for us!

We cannot be proud because we think we are invincible. We are so large that we can never fail! Some churches do think like that. Nothing will get in their way; nothing will stop them, because they are so good. These are the sort of churches that do not notice if the Holy Spirit leaves them, they are so well organised, so perfect.

Arrogance

And the Edomites were also arrogant. Verse 8

"In that day," declares the LORD, "will I not destroy the wise men of Edom, men of understanding in the mountains of Esau?" (Obadiah 1:8 NIV)

We are so wise, we do not need anyone else. The old independence argument. Something we have been looking at during Voyage of Discovery. Something it is so easy to fall into as a church. As a small church, you need all the help you can get, as a large church, you need no-one else. In the Baptist Union of Great Britain, there is Home Mission. Home Mission is used in the main to help small church afford the stipend of a minister, when they cannot quite afford it. Home Mission will give up to 50% of a stipend to a church in a mission situation. And where does that money come from? – It comes from churches within BUGB paying into Home Mission like we do. And it is noticeable that smaller churches often outstrip bigger churches in their giving to Home Mission if you compare giving per member.

The big church looks after itself and arrogantly says it need no-one else. We are all interdependent, or at least we should be. When arrogance comes in we become more and more independent.

Total Indifference

And lastly they had the sin of total indifference, even to a near cousin. Verse 11

"On the day you stood aloof while strangers carried off his wealth and foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem, you were like one of them. You should not look down on your brother in the day of his misfortune, nor rejoice over the people of Judah in the day of their destruction, nor boast so much in the day of their trouble. You should not march through the gates of my people in the day of their disaster, nor look down on them in their calamity in the day of their disaster, nor seize their wealth in the day of their disaster. You should not wait at the crossroads to cut down their fugitives, nor hand over their survivors in the day of their trouble." (Obadiah 1:11-14 NIV)

The Edomites were so indifferent to the plight of the Judah that they added to it and plundered them when they were down. They kicked Judah when Judah was at one of its lowest times. They really put the boot on good and proper and this is not on. We are here to help each other and one church

to help another, but it is so easy to be indifferent to the plight of another church and even to add to their downfall.

Judah must have felt awful, lost, alone beaten, downtrodden, low self-esteem, but then they hear

“The day of the LORD is near for all nations. As you have done, it will be done to you; your deeds will return upon your own head. Just as you drank on my holy hill, so all the nations will drink continually; they will drink and drink and be as if they had never been.”

“But on Mount Zion will be deliverance; it will be holy, and the house of Jacob will possess its inheritance. The house of Jacob will be a fire and the house of Joseph a flame; the house of Esau will be stubble, and they will set it on fire and consume it. There will be no survivors from the house of Esau.” The LORD has spoken.
(Obadiah 1:15-18 NIV)

What great words to hear. God is in control. Even though everything may be falling apart around us, God is in control. This week I visited a household and there was one of those calendars that had a verse a day. The person still had October 2nd up and it said something like

When bad things happen to be appearing to you remember that God has his hand in them and try to see this

And the verse of the day was

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28 NIV)

That is so true, but we can forget it so easily. For Judah, the Edomites were so much stronger, mightier, invincible, but they had forgotten that God is the one in control and not humans. What is to become of Edom? Verse 19

“People from the Negev, an area at the south of Palestine which is desert mostly, will occupy the mountains of Esau, and people from the foothills will possess the land of the Philistines. They will occupy the fields of Ephraim and Samaria (the northern kingdom), and Benjamin will possess Gilead. This company of Israelite exiles who are in Canaan will possess [the land] as far as Zarephath; the exiles from Jerusalem who are in Sepharad will possess the towns of the Negev. Deliverers will go up on Mount Zion to govern the mountains of Esau. And the kingdom will be the LORD’s.” (Obadiah 1:19-21 NIV)

It will work out because God is in control. As a church we are Going For Growth. How is this to happen? I’m not sure but God knows and he has a plan for us, we just need to not be proud of ourselves and our achievements, be arrogant about what we can do, and grow at the expense of others. We need to grow our own Christians and we do that by reaching out through many and various means.

Let us take the prophecy of Obadiah as a warning to us and also as an encouragement at the same time. May we always be a Judah and never an Edom.