

Obadiah

Judgment and Salvation

Judgment begins in v.1 [which names Edom as the subject of the prophecy] and extends throughout the book [which ends with Edom's subjection to God and Israel]. The salvation aspect of the passage begins in v.17 [with the prediction that the Hebrew people will reclaim their land] and extends through the end of the book [which ends with the Hebrews judging or ruling over Edom]. Edom has participated in the suffering and defeat of the two kingdoms of the Hebrews [as part of a long history of antagonism, as discussed in (4) below]. In this prophecy, the judgment of Edom and the salvation message for the Hebrews is intertwined by reversing the current course of events and predicting the resurgence of the Hebrew people of God at the expense of the people of Edom. So, during the judgment phase of the prophecy, Edom is chastised for its antagonism toward the Hebrews, and, during the salvation phase of the prophecy, the Hebrews are predicted to recover and ascend over Edom.

Literary Laws

The literary law that stands out to me is continuity:

- † In vv.1-9, there are at least nine statements about the destruction of Edom: nations will battle them; God will make them small; they are greatly despised; they are deceived; God will bring them down; they will be ransacked; their allies will turn against them; their leaders will be destroyed; and their mighty men will be dismayed.
- † In vv.10-16, there are at least nine statements about why Edom faces such judgment, all relating to their treatment of the Hebrews: they have been violent; they stood by as others plundered; they gloat over misfortunes; they rejoice over destruction; they have trespassed on the land; they gloat over the calamity; they have plundered; they have killed fugitives; and they have imprisoned fugitives.
- † In vv.17-21, there are at least nine statements about the resurrection of the Hebrew people as a nation: they will escape; they will be restored to their land; they will be a consuming fire; they will possess Edom; they will possess the land of the Philistines; they will possess Samaria; they will possess Gilead; they will possess the Negev; and they will judge or rule Edom.

As part of this continuity – particularly with the reasons for judgment – there is repetition, with “do not” preceding many statements. There also is evidence of parallels, making this prophecy poetic.

“Day of the Lord”

In the New Testament, the phrase “Day of the Lord” refers to the second coming of Christ, as in 2 Thes. 2:2.¹ The people of Israel thought of it as the day when Yahweh would intervene to put Israel at the head of the nations, but it also was proclaimed in the Old Testament as a day of judgment for Israel and for other individual nations.² Looking at the usage of this phrase in Obadiah, Joel, Amos, Isaiah, and Ezekiel, it appears there is an eschatological element in those passages, looking forward to the second coming of Christ when there will be a final judgment, yet simultaneously some of these prophecies specify specific nations for punishment, nations which no longer exist literally, such as Babylon [Isaiah 13] and Edom [Obadiah]. This aspect of “visionary prophecy” is the most confusing to me, the moving in and out from resolution of contemporary events to eschatological events without clear distinctions.

¹ J. S. Wright, “Day of the Lord,” in *New Bible Dictionary*, ed. I. Howard Marshall, A.R. Millard, J.I. Packer, and D.J. Wiseman (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, USA; 1996), 261.

² Wright, 261.

Edom

Gen 25:19-39: Jacob and Esau were twins who struggled in the womb, and God told Rebekah they would become two rival nations [Gen. 25:19-26]. Jacob tempted Esau into giving up his birthright [Gen. 25:27-34] and tricked Isaac into granting his blessing [Gen. 27:1-40], which resulted in Esau's hate [Gen. 27:41]. They appeared to make peace many years later, after Edom was established and Jacob was out on his own north of there [Gen. 33:1-20]. During the Exodus trek, Moses requested permission to pass through Edom, but Edom declined permission and took a threatening posture [Num 20:14-22]. This required an extensive detour around the mountains,³ yet God still told the Israelites not to detest the Edomites, because they were relatives [Deut. 23:7].

Saul fought victoriously against Edom [1 Sam. 14:47], though he did not occupy the territory.⁴ When David was on the run from Saul, it was an Edomite, Doeg, who goaded Saul into, and carried out the deed of, killing Ahimelech, eighty four other priests, and their families [1 Sam. 22:9-33], something that moved David enough to write Psalm 52. When king, David defeated Edom on the field of battle [2 Samuel 13], and placed garrisons in the land, made the Edomites his subjects [2 Samuel 14], and killed nearly every male in Edom [1 Kings 11:15]. One of the escaped sons of the king, Hadad, later returned from Egypt to rise up against Solomon [1 Kings 17-22]. However, Solomon was able to operate a copper mine in Edom and tax the trade route north to Moab.⁵ Edom successfully rebelled against Jehoram, when he was king of Judah [2 Kings 8:20-22]. Amaziah later killed over ten thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt and then conquered Sela [2 Kings 14:7]. The Edomites were not vanquished, however, for during the time of King Ahaz, the armies of Edom invaded Judah and took captives [2 Chron. 28:17]. By the time of Joel, God is providing prophecy about Edom's demise because of their attacks on Judah [Joel 3:19; see also Amos 1:11-12], and to Ezekiel God declared himself the enemy of the Edomites, decrying their continual hatred for and aggression against the people of Israel [Ezek. 35:1-15].

Obadiah wrote his prophecy either about the time of "the invasion of Jerusalem by the Philistines and Arabs during the reign of Jehoram" [contemporary with Elisha] or during "the Babylonian attacks on Jerusalem" [contemporary with Jeremiah].⁶ If the earlier date is accurate, the Edomites would have been "subordinate allies, and shared in the booty of Jerusalem when that unhappy capital fell to their combined efforts."⁷ This prophecy of Obadiah's thus could foretell the conquering of Sela [2 Kings 14:7], which means "rock" and was the capital⁸ or could foretell the eventual fall of Edom to the Babylonians.⁹ It appears the Edomites were displaced entirely from Edom, settling in the area later to be known as Idumea, where they were conquered and converted to the Jewish faith, though they might have thought to have the last laugh when one of their own, Herod the Great, came into control of Judea.¹⁰

³ Barry J. Beitzel, *The Moody Atlas of Bible Lands* (Chicago: Moody Press; 1985), 87.

⁴ Beitzel, 113.

⁵ Beitzel, 124.

⁶ Kenneth Barker, Gen. Ed., *The Zondervan NASB Study Bible*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House; 1999), 1289.

⁷ Gleason L. Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody Press; 1994), 333.

⁸ Barker, 1290.

⁹ Beitzel, 145.

¹⁰ Archer, 337-338.

Theme Verse and Statement

The theme verse is v.15: “For the day of the Lord draws near on all the nations. As you have done, it will be done to you. Your dealings will return on your own head.” The theme statement could be phrased, “God will bring justice, including judgment for sin and salvation for the righteous.”

Figures of Speech

Edom’s cities were atop a mountain range, an area characterized by “gigantic cliffs and steep gorges,” providing good fortification against attack.¹¹ Petra [which might be the same city as Sela, as both mean “the rock”¹²] was approached through a mile long corridor with high cliffs on both sides.¹³ The imagery in v.4, “Though you build high like the eagle, though you set your nest among the stars,” describes these fortified mountaintop cities, built up high like an eagle’s nest, particularly perhaps Sela, if it is to this city v.3 is directed.

¹¹ Beitzel, 24.

¹² Ronald A. Beers, Gen. Ed., *Life Application Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers; 1996), 1328; & Beitzel, 19.

¹³ Beitzel, 25.

SOURCES

- Archer, Gleason L. *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*. Chicago: Moody Press; 1994.
- Barker, Kenneth, Gen. Ed. *The Zondervan NASB Study Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House; 1999.
- Beers, Ronald A., Gen. Ed. *Life Application Study Bible*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers; 1996.
- Beitzel, Barry J. *The Moody Atlas of Bible Lands*. Chicago: Moody Press; 1985.
- Wright, J. S. "Day of the Lord." In *New Bible Dictionary*, ed. I. Howard Marshall, A.R. Millard, J.I. Packer, and D.J. Wiseman, 261. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, USA; 1996.