

# Introduction to Obadiah

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## Background

### Prophet's Name

The "iah" at the end of many names in the Old Testament is *Yah*, the short form of *Yahweh*, the name of the God of the Bible. What comes in front of the "iah" in names is a form of some Hebrew word that gives the full meaning of the name. Obadiah means "Servant of Yahweh."

Obadiah: עֲבַדְיָהּ "Servant of Yahweh"

[ עָבַד *to work, to serve*; עֲבָד *servant* ] + יָהּ (short for יהוה *Yahweh*)

### Identification

Unknown; 11 Obadiahs are mentioned in the Bible.

### Date

Obadiah is the most difficult prophet to date. Obadiah mentions an invasion of Jerusalem (v. 11), and there are four known times that Jerusalem was attacked:

By Shishak, king of Egypt (1 Kgs. 14:25-28; 2 Chr. 12:2-12)	925 B.C.	Reign of Rehoboam (931-913)
By the Philistines (2 Kgs. 8:20-24; 2 Chr. 21:16-22:1)	845 B.C.	Reign of Jehoram (848-841)
By Jehoash of Israel (2 Kgs. 14:8-14; 2 Chr. 25:14-24)	796-782 B.C.	Reign of Amaziah (796-767)
By Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (2 Kgs. 25:1-21; 2 Chr. 36:11-21; Jer. 39:1-10)	586 B.C.	Reign of Zedekiah (597-586)

Though many conservative scholars take a 586 date, choice two, 845 B.C., is favored for the following reasons:

- The description in verse 11 depicts several groups casting lots

to divide up the city for the purpose of plunder. This does not fit the complete destruction of the city at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. It does, however, accord well with the description in 2 Chr. 21:16 of the invasion--but not complete destruction--by the Philistines and Arabians.

- None of the six characteristics of 586 are mentioned: (1) the razing of the wall, (2) the burning of the royal palace and all the houses, (3) the burning of the Temple, (4) the capture and deportation of the king to Babylon, (5) the deportation of the entire nation to Babylon, and (6) the immigration of some Jews to Egypt.
- The literary parallels in Jeremiah indicate that Jeremiah is describing the destruction of his day--586--in terms of the past event described by Obadiah:

Obadiah 1-9	Jeremiah 49:7-16
1	14
2	15
3	16
4	9b
5	9a
6	10
8	7

- Verse 13 of Obadiah when correctly translated looks forward to future opportunities to despoil Jerusalem.

אַל-תָּבוֹא : "not" plus 3rd fs Qal jussive verb: "Do not go in"

This date of 845 B.C. would make Obadiah the earliest of the writing prophets.

### Basic Theme

#### Judgment on Edom

- Identification of Edom: descendants of Esau
- Capital city: Sela, likely the site later called Petra

Edom was the nation that descended from Esau. They settled in the region around Mt. Seir in Patriarchal times (see Gen. 36). Seir was a Horite, the people who occupied the area before being displaced and assimilated by the Edomites (see Gen. 32:3; 36:20-30; Deut. 2:4, 5, 8; 2:12, 22, 29).

Edom's pride and sense of security is based on its geographical location "in the clefts of the rock [Hebrew, *Sela*]" (v.3) high above sea level. This could be a general reference to their cliff dwellings or a reference to the actual city later captured by Amaziah (796-767 B.C.; 2 Kgs. 14:7; 2 Chron. 25:11f.). This city is generally associated with the later Nabataean capital, Petra, which in Greek also means "rock" (cf. Matt. 16:18).

## Outline

- I. Coming destruction of Edom, 1-9
  - A. The downfall of impregnable Sela, 1-4
  - B. The city to be plundered, devastated, and forsaken, 5-9
- II. Cause of Edom's judgment: her malice against Israel, 10-14
- III. Coming Day of Yahweh, 15-21
  - A. Impending judgment on Edom and the rest of the heathen, 15-16
  - B. Future deliverance of Israel, 17-20
  - C. Ultimate Messianic kingdom, 21

## Important Passages and Problems

### The "Day of Yahweh"

This is the first occurrence of the phrase "Day of Yahweh" ("the day of the LORD").

**Working definition:** The time of God's climactic work in history just before and as he ushers in the reign of Messiah and Messianic kingdom on earth; a day of both judgment as well as salvation affecting (1) men, (2) nations, and (3) nature.

Verse 15 states that "the day of the LORD is near." Many of the prophets echo the same theme:

Joel 1:15; 2:1  
Isaiah 13:6  
Zephaniah 1:7, 14  
Ezekiel 30:3

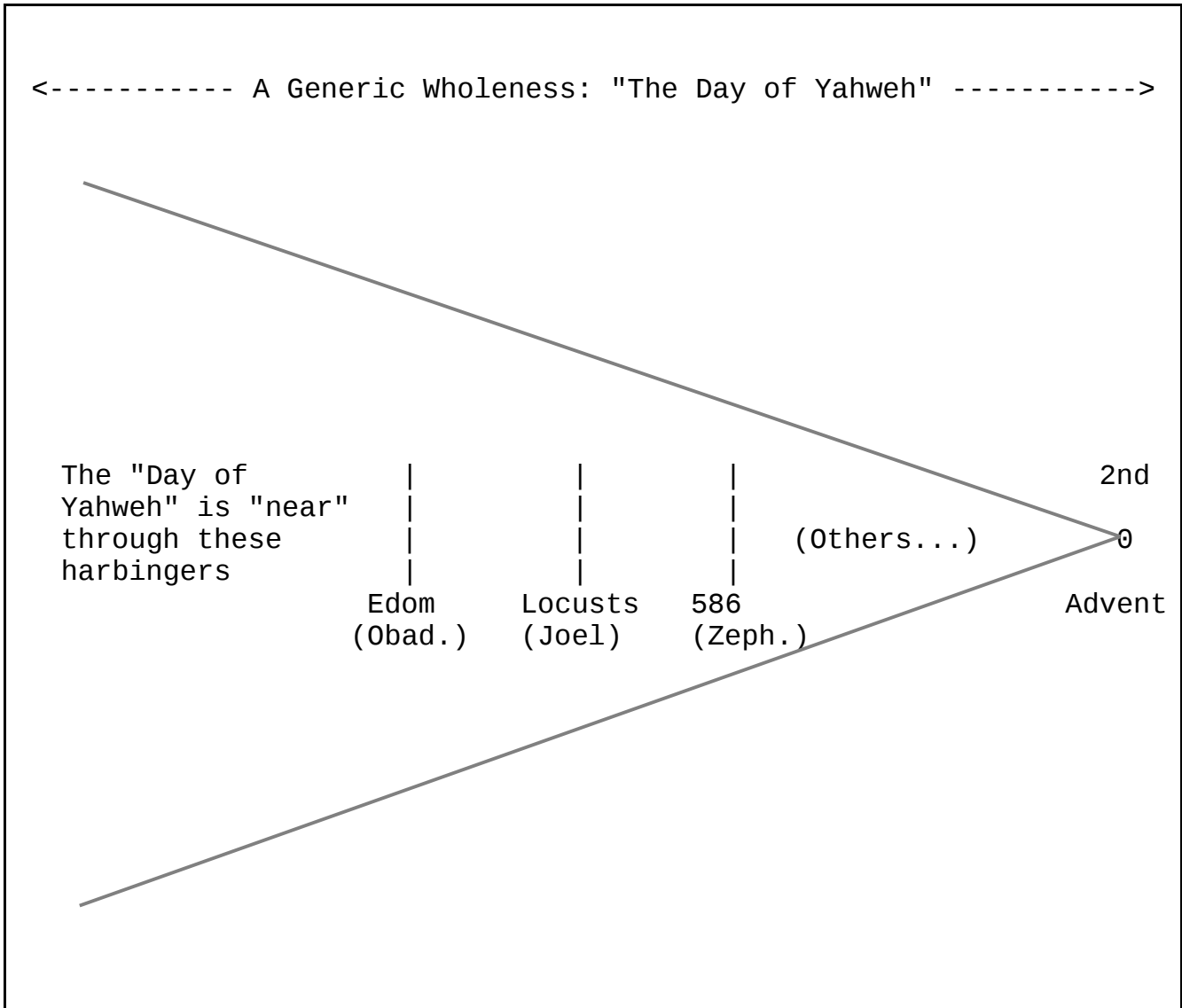
These prophets span four centuries! How can the day of Yahweh be "near" to each of them? Were they wrong? Even to this day it has not yet come.

The answer is in the concept of a *corporate event*. Beecher calls this type of prophecy a *generic prophecy* (*The Prophets and the Promise*, p. 130). In a corporate event, there is a *generic wholeness* that incorporates into the *single* meaning of its name both *historical antecedents*--harbingers, previews, forerunners, or downpayments--as well as the *final, climactic manifestation*. Some of the historical antecedents of the day of Yahweh include the judgment on Edom (Obadiah), the plague of locusts on Judah (Joel), and the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by Babylon (Isaiah). Thus, the day of Yahweh was "near" for each of these prophets. The final, climactic manifestation of the day of Yahweh is the culmination of this age in the eschatological complex of events surrounding the second advent of Christ. What it will be like *then* is seen to a lesser degree in the *historical event* of the time of the prophet. Note the diagram on the next page.

This concept is critical in the interpretation of the prophets. It will come up again and again with many passages in addition to those specifically dealing with the "Day of Yahweh." It does *not* involve *double meaning (double sense)*, and neither is it accurately described by the so-called "law of *double fulfillment*," a highly dubious hermeneutical principle.

Finally, compare this statement, "the day of Yahweh is near," with "the kingdom of heaven *is at hand*" (Matt. 3:2; 4:17, 23): "is at hand" is ἤγγικεν, 3rd singular perfect active indicative of ἐγγίζω, *to draw near*.

Here is a graphical representation of the generic concept of "the day of Yahweh":



The Fulfillment of the Prophecy

Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, p. 303, writes:

As to the fulfillment of this doom upon Edom, it may be fairly inferred from Malachi 1:3-5 that by Malachi's time (435 B.C.) the Edomites had already been driven from Sela and Mount Seir by the overwhelming forces of the Nabatean Arabs. Secular sources inform us that as early as the reign of Darius I (521-485), the Nabateans had pushed the Edomites out of their ancestral territory and driven them into the deserted regions of southern Judea. The Nabateans originally came from Nabaioth in the

region of Kedar in northern Arabia. Seventh-century Assyrian inscriptions refer to them as the Nabaitai. In the course of time the power of this Nabatean kingdom extended up into the Trans-jordanian region as far as Damascus. By New Testament times Damascus was held for a while at least by King Aretas of the Nabatean dynasty (cf. 2 Co 11:32). As for the dispossessed Edomites, the region in which they settled came to be known as Idumea, where they maintained an independent existence for a time, until they were conquered by the Jewish king, John Hyrcanus (135-105 B.C.), and forcibly converted to the Jewish faith. In the following century, the dynasty of Herod the Great, descended from the Idumean stock, came into control of the kingdom of Judea.

### Definition of "Poetic Justice"

The theme of Obadiah can be characterized as "poetic justice":

An outcome of a fictitious or real situation in which vice is punished and virtue is rewarded usually in a manner peculiarly or ironically appropriate to the particular situation"  
(Webster's 3rd Unabridged).

Edom "stood aloof" and "gloated" over the calamity suffered by his brother Israel when Jerusalem was invaded. So Edom will come to its end in a similar way. "As you have done, it will be done to you" (v. 15).

### **Bibliography**

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