

OBADIAH

How to Use This Discussion Guide with Your Group

Start with a prayer, and then read the introduction from the sheet. Read the portion of the text from your Bible or an app (use whatever translation you're comfortable with, but we suggest the New Living Translation (NLT) or the English Standard Version (ESV)). Then read the summary paragraph(s) and talk through the questions for that section. You can work through this guide in one session or spread it out over several – whatever works for your group. As you read and discuss, consider how what you're reading applies to your life today. Don't forget to close with prayer!

AN INTRODUCTION TO OBADIAH

The country of Edom lies south of the Dead Sea, and to the south-east of Judah. Its people are descended from Esau, just as the Israelites are descendants of Jacob. Esau and Jacob were twins. Esau was the elder brother and the rightful heir of the promises God made to his father Isaac and his grandfather Abraham. However, Esau never took God seriously. Jacob, on the other hand, was determined to supplant Esau, and succeeded in cheating him of his inheritance. The story of Esau and Jacob is told in Genesis 25–36.

Centuries later, when the Israelites asked Edom's permission to use the 'King's Highway' (the most direct route from Egypt to Canaan), they were refused. A long running enmity was established between Israel and Edom, which features frequently in the Old Testament story. Edom becomes a typical example of people who are insensitive to God and oppose his plans.

We don't know who Obadiah was, but his name means 'Servant of the Lord'. There are other people with the same name in the Old Testament, but none of them is the author of this book.¹

A DEVASTATING PLAGUE OF LOCUSTS

Read 1:1–14 in your Bible.

At the time of Obadiah's prophecy, Edom sits proud and strong in her high mountain setting. Her main cities are Bozrah and Sela (which means 'rocks'). Petra is just such a city (although built later, in the 4th century BC) and is a favorite with tourists today. Obadiah warns Edom that nowhere is too high for God to reach. In fact Edom is about to be brought down to earth very decisively indeed. Her treasures will be ransacked, her allies will betray her, her wise people will be powerless and her warriors will be destroyed.

This catastrophe is to overtake Edom because she looked on and cheered when Jerusalem was sacked by Nebuchadnezzar in 587 BC. Family ties should have drawn Edom to help Judah, but in the event she sided with Babylon. Psalm 137 records the appalling betrayal:

¹ Andrew Knowles, *The Bible Guide*, 1st Augsburg books ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2001), 367.

*Remember, O Lord, what the Edomites did
on the day Jerusalem fell.
'Tear it down,' they cried,
'tear it down to its foundations!' (Psalm 137:7).*

Obadiah condemns Edom for watching while Jerusalem was looted by foreigners—the Chaldeans from Babylon. He recalls vividly Edom's shameful behavior towards 'your brother Jacob'. Worse still, the Edomites joined in the looting, ambushed the refugees and handed over survivors to the enemy.²

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR VERSES 1-14

Start talking.

1. Where was your safe place of retreat as a child? Why there? Where is such a place for you now?

Start digging.

2. This prophecy about Edom is drawn from the words of an earlier prophet (see Jeremiah 49:7-22).
3. What, if anything, does Obadiah's introduction (v. 1a) tell you about the historical context of this writing or the event it portends (contrast Amos 1:1, for a more informative prologue)?
4. Who are the Edomites named after (see Genesis 36:1, 8-9)? What was the relationship like between Jacob and Esau (see Genesis 27:41-44; 33:4, 16-17a)? What does Hebrews 12:15-17 say about this brotherly relationship? About the bitterness and godlessness of Esau?
5. What natural fortifications give Edom an illusion of security (v. 3)? To whom are they still vulnerable (vv. 4, 7)?
6. What is the point of Obadiah's eagle imagery (v. 4; compare Isaiah 40:30-31)? What message is intended by the poetic imagery in verses 5-6?
7. What happens "in that day" of the Lord's judgment (vv. 8ff)? Why is this judgment coming upon Edom? Do you find Edom's bad attitude toward Judah surprising? Why or why not? What does this tell you about the history of relations between these nations?
8. How do you think Israel responded to this message of doom for Edom, their enemy?

Start applying.

9. Upon what rock-like structures might you be basing your security: An insurance policy? A church? A family inheritance? How might this "pride of your heart" be deceiving you?
10. Has that security been shaken by God? How so?
11. How do you respond when disaster befalls someone you know: (a) Avoid the disaster, lest you also get hit? (b) Rescue the perishing? (c) Comfort the bereaved? (d) Do what you can to prevent the disaster from happening again? (e) Give an example.
12. Edom was judged for not serving brother Jacob when Jacob was down and out. What down-and-out persons should you be serving? How might you begin to serve them this week?

² Andrew Knowles, *The Bible Guide*, 1st Augsburg books ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2001), 367.

THE DAY OF THE LORD

Read 1:15–21 in your Bible.

Obadiah has a far greater vision than revenge on Edom. He opens up a vista of all that God will do, for all the nations and for the whole of time.

*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*

(v. 15).

JUDGMENT... AND SALVATION

Obadiah's message of judgment on Israel's enemies is only one aspect of Old Testament prophecy. There are several occasions when the prophets speak of Israel's enemies turning to God and receiving salvation. This is true of Egypt and Assyria in Isaiah's prophecy (Isaiah 19:19–25), and of Nineveh, the Assyrian capital, in the story of Jonah, the next book of the Bible.

Just as the Edomites drank themselves to a stupor when they joined in the sacking of Jerusalem, so will the nations drink God's judgment until they fall into oblivion. But at the center, safe and strong, will be Mount Zion, God's holy city and refuge. The house of Jacob (God's people) will be fully reinstated; 'the house of Joseph' (the northern kingdom of Israel) will also be restored.

God's people will not be passive when the Day of the Lord comes. They will be like the field fires after the harvest, sweeping across the stubble of God's enemies. The godless 'house of Esau' (Edom and all who oppose God) will be utterly destroyed.

Obadiah ends his message with a description of lands being shared out and possessed as the Jewish exiles return, and other peoples move into Edom's space. Mount Zion herself will become the center of government and justice, from which 'deliverers' (saviors) will administer God's perfect kingdom.³

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR VERSES 15-21

Start talking.

1. What experience, if any, have you or your church had in helping to relocate "exiles"?

Start digging.

2. What new parameters do you see in "the day of the Lord," as used in verse 15? By what logic will it come upon Edom?

³ Andrew Knowles, *The Bible Guide*, 1st Augsburg books ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2001), 367–368.

3. To whom is this word addressed? How are the house of Esau and the house of Jacob contrasted here?
4. What would Edom have drunk on Mt. Zion (v. 16)? Is this drinking language meant literally or figuratively? Why do you think so (see Jeremiah 25:15-16)? What is the message intended by this language?
5. If Edom's allies will defeat her (v. 7), who will finish the job (vv. 19-21)? How total will be their ultimate defeat?
6. In what ways would the return of the exiles (vv. 19ff) be a social event? A political event? A theological event?

Start applying.

7. Just as Judah waited for the "Day of the Lord" in this passage, what "Day of the Lord" do you await?
8. In your opinion, is that day too far away to be concerned about? Or is it "right around the corner," on this month's calendar? In either event, what are you doing and "drinking" (v. 16) in preparation for that day?
9. Who are some displaced persons today? What hope might Obadiah offer them? What would Obadiah say to those who encouraged their displacement?
10. How would you respond if God called you to share a message like Obadiah's with some people today? What audience might be ripe for that message? How do you think they would respond?