

Obadiah

Fact Sheet

Timeline:

- circa 922 BCE - End of King Solomon's rule; "united monarchy" of kingdom of Israel ends, "divided" monarchy begins. The northern Kingdom keeps the name Israel; the southern kingdom is known as Judah.
- 597 BCE - Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem and first deportation (start of the Babylonian exile)
- 587-86 BCE - Destruction of Jerusalem (including Temple) and second deportation
- 539 BCE - Exile ends.
- Obadiah written during exile or shortly after the exiles' return

General Background:

This book is written against the Edomites, a country to the south and west of Judah. During the conquest of Jerusalem (the capital of Judah), the people of Edom not only didn't help their Judean brothers & sisters, but they participated in looting and assisted the Babylonians by handing over Judeans who tried to escape. What makes all of this worse is that the Edomites were said to have descended from Esau, Jacob's (aka Israel's) twin brother.

"Obadiah" means "worshipper" or "servant of Yahweh (God, the Lord)." It was a fairly common name during this period, given to children by parents hoping the kids would grow into it. In regards to the prophet Obadiah, however, this name is all we know about him.

Remember, the way "prophecy" is understood in our scriptures is not in the sense of "predicting the future." Rather, it is a message related to the present state of affairs, where a "prophetic voice" calls 'em like he or she sees 'em, carrying a message of either hope *for* the future, or judgment, or both. Obadiah includes both. Also, lots of Old Testament prophecy is written in poetic verse (watch for lots of indenting), and Obadiah follows suit. FYI, one characteristic of poetry from the folks back then was to repeat something you just said, but change the wording just a little bit. Just so you know, one trait of verse from the people of this time was to restate something you just stated, but alter the words slightly.

Overview:

- Verses 1-9: The oracle against Edom
- Verse 10-14: The wrongs Edom committed

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Verses 15-21: Hope-filled utopian vision of the restoration of Israel & the destruction of its enemies. (Historians are unsure whether the specific events described ever came about.)

Definitions & Notes:

Verse 1: "vision" = a special Hebrew word for what the prophets saw.

V. 3: "clefts of the rock" = either the rocky terrain of Edom, or Sela (see footnote in Bible), a major city of Edom whose name means "rock."

"whose dwelling is in the heights" = The Edomites think pretty "highly" of themselves.

V. 5-9: A lament over the fall of Edom, whose one-time allies have since turned on it.

V. 6: "Esau" (and later, "Mount Esau") = Edom

V. 9: "Teman" = an important city in Edom, so therefore it also = Edom

V. 10: "Jacob" = Judah

V. 11: "Jerusalem" = Jerusalem and also represents all of Judah

V. 15: "the day of the Lord" = not a 24-hour period, but a "promised time when the Lord will finally set everything right, whether for punishment or reward."

V. 16-17: "Mount Zion"/"holy mountain" = the Temple Mount, still in ruins. Represents Jerusalem and all the people of Israel & Judah.

V. 17: "those that escape" = those who have returned from exile.

V. 18: "Joseph" = Jacob's (Israel's) son, so therefore = Israel & Judah

V. 19: "Negeb" & "Shephelah" = regions in Judah.

"Ephraim," "Gilead," & "Samaria" = regions in and the major city of Israel (the northern kingdom).

"Benjamin" = a part of Judah

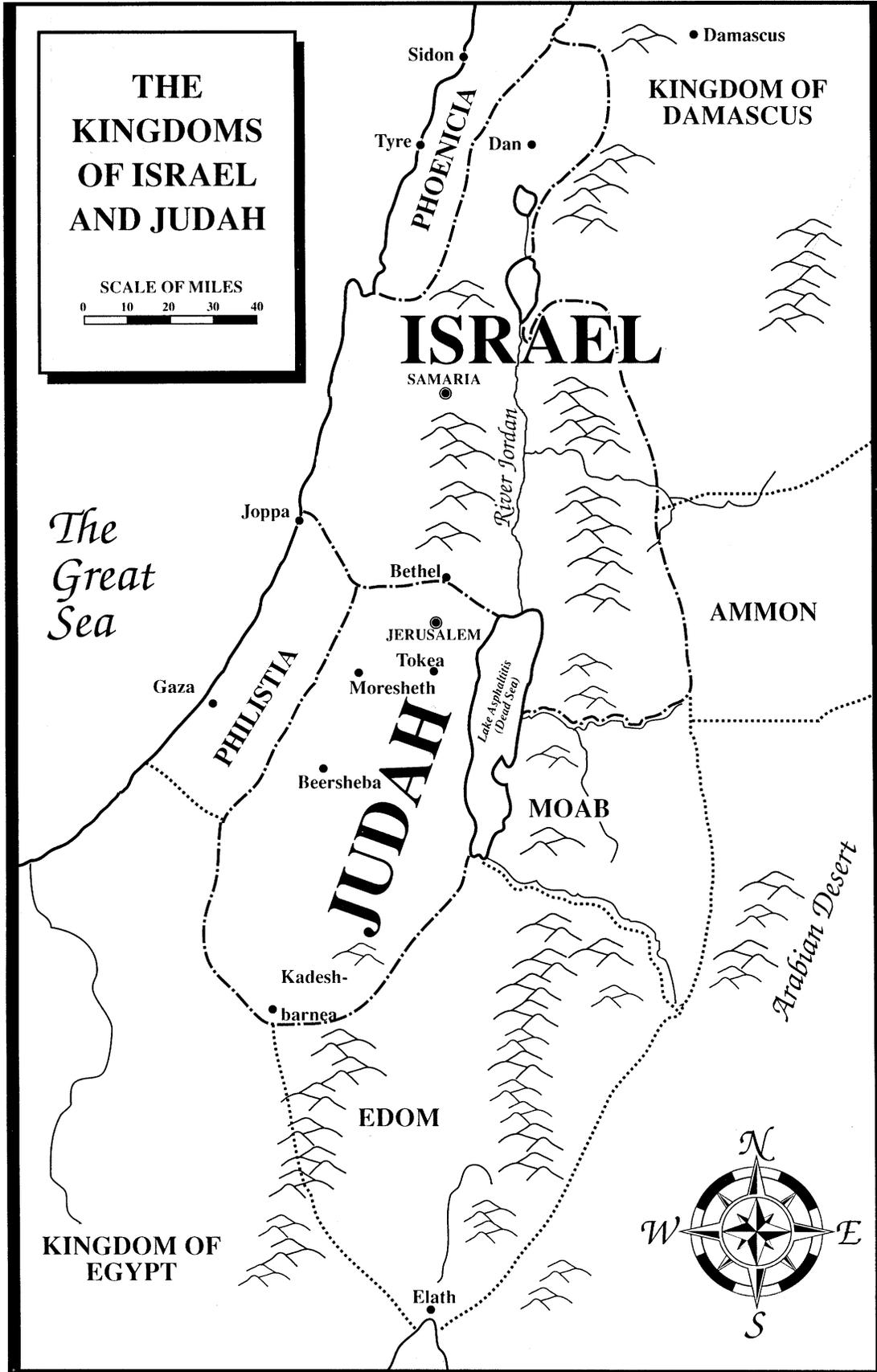
V. 20: "Halah" & "Sepharad" = region(s) in Mesopotamia (Babylon) where the exiles were.

"Phoenicia" & "Zarephath" = a region northwest of Israel and a city there, formerly occupied by the Canaanites.

V. 21: "those who have been saved" = "those that escape," v. 17

Sources: HarperCollins Bible Dictionary, Paul J. Achtemeier, Editor: HarperCollins Study Bible, especially article by Richard Henshaw.

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Discussion Questions

How do you feel about the Edomites?

How do you feel about *God* as depicted in *Obadiah*?

What surprised you today?

Luther thought of the *Scriptures* as containing both *Law* and *Gospel* throughout, convicting us of our failures and then showing us *God's* grace. So...

Where in this book do you hear the *Law*? That is, what shows our sin, convicting us, driving us to seek *God's* grace?

Where in this book do you hear the *Gospel*? That is, what shows us *God's* future for us, our hope, *God's* grace in our lives?

Why do you think *Obadiah* "made it in" to the Bible?