

## The Half Hour That Changes the World

**Obadiah**

**Book 31**

### **Basic Questions behind the book:**

*How should we respond when we are faced with things that anger us?*

### **Summary of book:**

I've posed the above question, because when you read through this short Old Testament book, the first thing that you will notice is that it is an unrestrained rant against a geographical and political neighbour, Edom. It is the shortest book in the Old Testament. The message is clear: Obadiah is basically saying "I am hopping mad at you – you're going to get what you've got coming to you – we'll see who is still standing at the end!" We're not completely sure of the historical context. There are so many times when Edom acted as an irritant in the life of the nation of Judah. There are verses which might suggest an early date just after the split into the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah. There are verses that suggest that Jerusalem has been ransacked which would suggest a later date. We don't know for sure.

### **Vital Statistics:**

Purpose: To show that God judges those who have harmed his people.

Author: Obadiah. Very little is known about this man, whose name means 'servant' or 'worshipper' of Yahweh (the LORD).

Recipients: To the Edomites who were a southern neighbour of Judah, to Judah itself, and to God's people everywhere.

Dating: It is possible that we can date Obadiah's prophecy to the reign of Jehoram in Judah, which would make it somewhere in the middle of the 9<sup>th</sup> century BC (c 850 BC). Another view is that it was written down much later around the same time as Jeremiah's ministry just before the Fall of Jerusalem (c. 627 – 586 BC). We do not really know.

Setting: Historically, Edom has constantly harassed the Jews. Prior to Obadiah's time they had participated in attacks on the southern kingdom. Edom was traditionally believed to have descended from Esau and thus the age old clash between Jacob and Esau continued.

Special Feature: Obadiah uses vigorous poetry and is written in the form of a dirge of doom.

### **Other Reflections:**

So what's the message for us in all of this 'ranting and raving'? I believe it has something to do with justice and the activity of God in others. For the Jews in their Temple, and for us in our church fellowships, we can sometimes forget that God is intensely and just as interested in 'them' / those who are not one of our group, as he is in us. Here in Obadiah, his interest takes the form of judgment and justice. There is also a message here about ultimate justice. Sometimes when we are being persecuted unfairly and being treated appallingly, we can be tempted to feel abandoned by God. However the message here is that God will ultimately, whether in this life or beyond, bring judgment on our oppressors. That is why we shouldn't let the sun go down on our anger. That is why we shouldn't hold grudges or get all tied up in bitterness. Whatever 'they' (whoever they might be) did to you, will in the end be dealt with by God. Finally, I think there is something here for us about the need to give expression in writing to our anger and to so give vent to our emotions. Don't bottle it up and don't lash it out on others. Write it down, get it off your chest in that way, and then burn the letter. Leave it with God and then move on.

*"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." (verse 15)*