

INTRODUCTION:

The Books of Obadiah and Joel cannot be dated to a specific time period. Some scholars place them before the Babylonian exile and others afterward. Both make reference to the downfall of Edom because of their attitude towards Israel. Both also speak of Israel's restoration and deliverance and the coming of the “day of the Lord.” The central teaching of Obadiah is Edom's doom prior and perhaps associated with the coming of the “day of the Lord.” Joel's central teaching is a call for sincere repentance and the pouring out of God's Spirit on all mankind. Joel identifies this as a sign of the coming “day of the Lord” when Israel will be restored and nations will be judged. There are numerous teachings within these books particularly relevant to Christians. First, Obadiah makes it clear that we cannot ignore the needs of our neighbors but must help and defend them rather than capitalize on their suffering. To do otherwise is to invite divine judgment. Second, Joel makes it clear that God desires our sincere repentance and is willing to deliver us even when we don't deserve it. Third, Joel teaches that God's Spirit is available to all people who will call upon Him with repentance asking for deliverance. And finally, fourth, both Obadiah and Joel teach that God will restore His people and judge those who have caused them to suffer. This is why we must be involved in the critical crisis taking place in the Middle East around Israel and the Jewish people.

BOOK OF OBADIAH:

Obadiah is the shortest book in the Old Testament. Though there are thirteen different men with this name mentioned in the Old Testament, none of them can be identified as this prophet with certainty. Obadiah means “servant of Yahweh.” No definite conclusions can be drawn as to the date, though prophecies regarding the destruction of Edom and references to the captivity of Jerusalem within the book have caused many scholars to date it after 586 B.C. Other scholars place the events during the reign of Jehoram (853-841 B.C.), when the Philistines and the Arabs invaded Jerusalem. Obadiah's prophecy predicts the fall and utter destruction of Edom (compare Isaiah 34:5-15; Jeremiah 49:7-22; Ezekiel 25:12-14; Amos 1:11-12). It seems to have been written for the encouragement of the Israelites, rather than to bring Edom to repentance. Edom, the sons of Esau, was the perennial enemy of Judah, the sons of Jacob, and repeatedly displayed their bitter hatred by attacking Judah. Edom openly rejoiced at the defeat of Judah (Psalm 137:7) and filtered into the vacuum created by Babylon's victory. Though they were proud of their mountain strongholds, which seemed to be invincible, they

would not be able to stand against the day of the Lord. When Malachi (1:2-5) was written, Edom had been severely defeated. Nabatean Arabs defeated Edom and occupied their territory, which was later called Idumea. The Herods of New Testament times were from the Edomite remnant in Idumea. After the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 the Edomites passed finally from the pages of history.

LESSON OF OBADIAH:

The lesson of the book is that pride comes before a fall. A nation that proudly seeks its own advantages and remains indifferent to the cries of its suffering neighbors and exults in their calamity will suffer divine punishment and see the collapse of a self-sufficient dependence upon material supports.

Obadiah foretells the destruction of Edom (vs. 1-9) and the reason of it, namely, Edom's unbrotherly attitude toward the children of Jacob (vs. 10-11), warns Edom accordingly not to exult over the people of Judah in their distress (vs. 12-16), and predicts the deliverance and enlargement of Israel (vs. 17-21). The entire prophecy derives its incentive and strength from the great truth, clearly discerned by other holy men of God as well as by Obadiah, that the day of the Lord is coming upon all nations (v. 15) to the destruction of every foe, native and foreign, of the Lord's (v. 21; Isaiah 2:12, 17, 20-21; 10:12-19; Joel 3:12-21; Amos 5:18; 9:8-15; Micah 4:11-13).

BOOK OF JOEL:

Joel, which means “Yahweh is God,” is named as the author of these prophecies. The name is found several times elsewhere in the Old Testament, but none of these men can be identified with this prophet who is called the son of Pethuel. Therefore, we know nothing of Joel beyond this writing. It is almost impossible to assign a date for its origin. Scholars have tended to date it either among the earliest or latest of the prophetic writings but more or less agree that his ministry was carried out in Judah. Conservative scholars generally place it during the reign of Joash (ninth century B.C.), before the exile. It is noted that the enemies mentioned in Joel are the Philistines, Phoenicians, Egyptians, and Edomites of their earlier history rather than Assyria and Babylonia of later historical importance. Other scholars place it after the exile, pointing out that no mention is made of the northern kingdom and that elders and priests seem to be in authority rather than the king. Neither of these lines of reasoning is conclusive for dating nor is the fact that it is the second book in order among the minor prophets. The prophecy is clearly divided into two parts. In 1:1—2:17 Joel uses the description of a plague of locusts and a drought to

call the people to repentance with fear, fasting and prayer. In 2:18—3:21 God’s mercy drives out the locusts and gives a plentiful harvest, bringing blessings to His people and punishment to their enemies. “The day of the Lord” which is coming is a major theme in Joel. On the day of Pentecost Peter quoted Joel 2:28-32 about the outpouring of the Spirit, stating that it was fulfilled on that day (Acts 2:14-21).

(God’s Judgment will bring destruction)

Joel 1:1-4

(1) The word of the LORD that came to Joel, the son of Pethuel. (2) Hear this, O elders, and listen, all inhabitants of the land. Has anything like this happened in your days or in your fathers' days? (3) Tell your sons about it, and let your sons tell their sons, and their sons the next generation. (4) What the gnawing locust has left, the swarming locust has eaten; and what the swarming locust has left, the creeping locust has eaten; and what the creeping locust has left, the stripping locust has eaten.

Comments:

(1:4) The four names of the locus possibly represent four different stages of its growth. This verse portrays an event where they would come swarm after swarm and totally consume everything. It would be a plague to end all plagues. It is a fitting representation of the completeness of the Lord’s judgment. Absolutely nothing would be able to escape from it. It could also describe the different nations who would come and plunder Judah one after another until finally the Babylonians would carry them away into exile.

(The Day of the Lord)

Joel 1:15

(15) Alas for the day! For the day of the LORD is near, and it will come as destruction from the Almighty.

Comments:

“The day of the Lord” is found four other times in Joel (2:1, 11, 31; 3:14). It is also mentioned by the prophets Amos (5:18, 20), Obadiah (v. 15), Zephaniah (1:7, 14, 18; 2:2) and Malachi (4:5). The “day of the Lord” is an eschatological term; it is the day of the Lord’s self-revelation to judge evil and to bring His work of redemption among men to completion. In that day Yahweh manifests Himself in triumph over His foes and interposes in behalf of His people to deliver them. In the New Testament it is the day of Christ, the day of His coming in the glory of the Father. It is the day of wrath (Romans

2:5 ff), a day of judgment (Matthew 10:15; Romans 2:16), a great day (Jude 6). Sometimes it is called “that day” (Matthew 7:22); 1 Thessalonians 5:4) or simply “the Day” (1 Corinthians 3:13); also “the day of our Lord Jesus” (2 Corinthians 1:14); “the day of Jesus Christ” or “Christ” (Philippians 1:6, 10).

(Call for repentance)

Joel 2:12-14

(12) "Yet even now," declares the LORD, "Return to Me with all your heart, and with fasting, weeping, and mourning; (13) and rend your heart and not your garments. Now return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness, and relenting of evil. (14) Who knows whether He will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind Him, even a grain offering and a libation for the LORD your God?"

Comments:

After painting a picture of a land which will be completely destroyed, without sustenance for man or beast, the Lord called upon Israel to repent. Though the calamity was so serious that it seemed to be the forerunner of the Day of the Lord, He begged the people to return to Him with sincere repentance. Though they certainly deserved the punishment He was reluctant to inflict it upon them. Even at that late moment He would remove the locusts and restore the land to full productivity. Everything depended upon their willingness to humble themselves before Him and “*rend your heart and not your garments. Now return to the Lord your God.*”

(Pouring out of God’s Spirit)

Joel 2:28-32

(28) "And it will come about after this that I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; and your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. (29) And even on the male and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days. (30) And I will display wonders in the sky and on the earth, blood, fire, and columns of smoke. (31) The sun will be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. (32) And it will come about that whoever calls on the name of the LORD Will be delivered; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be those who escape, as the LORD has said, even among the survivors whom the LORD calls.”

Comments:

(2:28-29) These verses are a way of saying that God’s Spirit will be poured out on all people and not just limited to a select few. The language is inclusive, including males and females, young and old, prominent and poor. It is a way of saying that the Spirit will be available to everyone.

(2:30-32) The pouring out of God’s Spirit is seen as a sign that the great day of the Lord is near. Thus, the pouring out of God’s Spirit is to come before and mark the beginning of the day of the Lord. The signs in the sky which include the darkening of the sun will be the final signs immediately preceding the conclusion of the day of the Lord. Jesus denotes these signs as those immediately preceding His return (Matthew 24:29-31).

(2:28-32) When he was confronted with the need to explain the extraordinary miraculous events of the day of Pentecost, Peter quoted this passage as being fulfilled on that day (Acts 2:17-21).

(Nations will be judged)

Joel 3:1-4

(1) "For behold, in those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, (2) I will gather all the nations, and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat. Then I will enter into judgment with them there on behalf of My people and My inheritance, Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations; and they have divided up My land. (3) They have also cast lots for My people, traded a boy for a harlot, and sold a girl for wine that they may drink. (4) Moreover, what are you to Me, O Tyre, Sidon, and all the regions of Philistia? Are you rendering Me a recompense? But if you do recompense Me, swiftly and speedily I will return your recompense on your head."

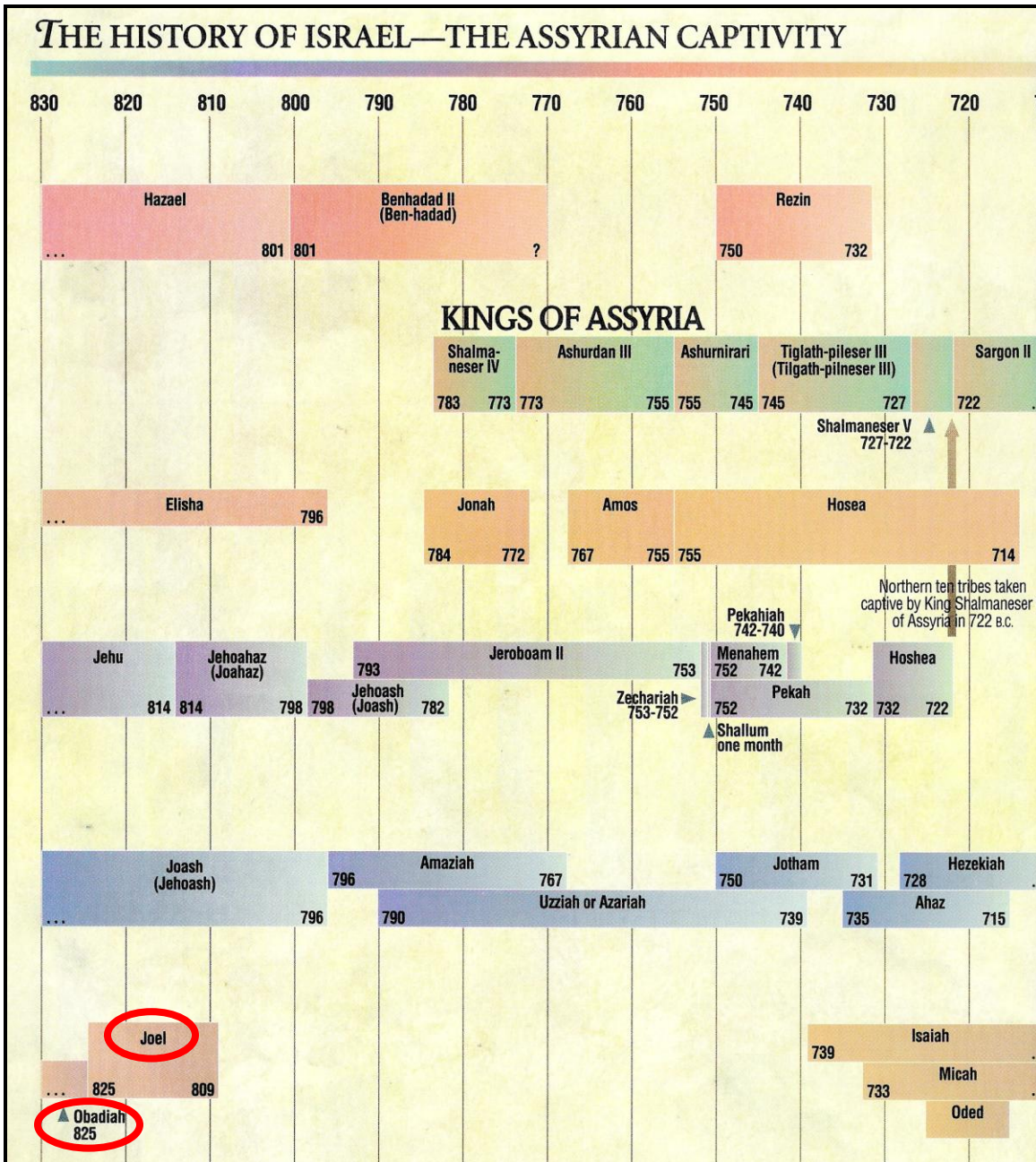
Comments:

These verses attest that the judgment of all nations will occur after God restores Judah and Jerusalem. Some would interpret this as having been accomplished in 1948 and 1967 when, respectively, Israel became a nation and then regained control of Jerusalem. God says He will judge those who scattered His inheritance among the nations, and He specifically lists Tyre, Sidon and Philistia among the nations to be punished. These places would correspond to Lebanon and Gaza today.

What follows in the final verses of Joel is a great war in the proximity of Israel, but God will be their refuge, delivering them, and afterward Judah will be blessed.



The chart below illustrates the time period in which Amos and Hosea lived.



References:

Commentary from “*The New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible*” and “*Zodhiates’ Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible*” published by AMG Publishers.

Map from “*Atlas of the Bible and Christianity.*”

Chart from “*The International Inductive Study Bible*”