

---

# עובדיה • OBADIAH

---

## INTRODUCTION

The *Book of Obadiah* forms part of the anti-Edomite polemic current after 587 BCE (cf. Ps 137:7, Jr 49:7ff, Lm 4:21–22, Ezk 25:12ff, 35:1ff, MI 1:2ff): the Edomites had taken advantage of the destruction of Jerusalem to invade southern Judaea, and the memory of these events was still very much alive; the prophecy seems to have been composed in Judah before the return from Exile. Vv. 1–14 indict the Edomites for outrageous and hostile actions when their Israelite kinfolk were in peril. Starting from these recent events in the experience of his people, Obadiah, like Joel, moves on to portray their future consummation. Vv. 15–18 announce the day of Yahweh's recompense on the nations for their shameful behaviour. A final section (vv. 19–21) proclaims the return of Israel's Exiles to the Promised Land, their dominion over Edom and Yahweh's universal sovereignty.

In the *Masoretic Text*, the *Book of Obadiah* is 4<sup>th</sup> among the 12 'Minor Prophets' but, in the *Septuagint*, it is 5<sup>th</sup>, coming after Micah & Joel. Text from the book appears in only one of the *Qumran MSS* – 4QXII<sup>g</sup>.

The passionate appeal for national vengeance is in sharp contrast to the internationalism of the second part of Isaiah, for instance; but it is also a tribute to the terrible justice and power of Yahweh – the defender of the right – and must not be isolated from the whole prophetic movement, of which it represents no more than a fleeting moment.

## AUTHORSHIP AND DATES

Nothing is known of the person of the prophet Obadiah; even his name is not distinctive and is used of 12 different people in the Bible; however, none of these can be safely identified as the author of this book. The problems of date and composition of his brief work, the shortest book in the Old Testament, are not easily solved. Some of the oracles in the book were spoken, or written, soon after Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians in 587/586 BCE. Obadiah may not himself have written all of the present book but may have drawn upon collections of sayings transmitted orally among prophetic circles. This could account for the similarity between vv. 1–9 and Jr 49:7–22. Nevertheless, the work is dominated by the theme of justice and judgement and may well be the product of one voice. There is no need to attribute the passage on the Day of Yahweh (vv. 15–18) to a later date or another author – only vv. 19–21 seem to be a post-Exilic addition. By the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century BCE, the 12 books of the Minor Prophets constituted a unit (see Si 49:10).

## עובדיה

חֲזֹן עֲבַדְיָה כֹּה־אָמַר אֲדַנִּי יְהוָה לְאֲדוֹם

שְׁמוּעָה שָׁמַעְנוּ מֵאֵת יְהוָה

וַצִּיר בְּגוֹיִם שְׁלַח קוֹמוּ

וְנִקְוָמָה עָלֶיהָ לְמַלְחָמָה:

הִנֵּה קִטְוֹן נִתְתִּיךָ בְּגוֹיִם

בְּזוּי אַתָּה מְאֹד:

זְדוֹן לְבָבְךָ הִשִּׂיֵאֶךָ

שָׁכַנִּי בְּחַגְוֵי־סֶלַע מְרוֹם שְׁבָתוֹ

אָמַר בְּלִבּוֹ

מִי יוֹרְדֵנִי אֶרֶץ:

אִם־תִּגְבִּיָּה כַּנְּשֹׁר

וְאִם־בֵּין כּוֹכְבִים שָׁיִם קִנִּיךָ

מִשָּׁם אֹרִידֶךָ נִאִם־יְהוָה:

אִם־גְּנָבִים בְּאוֹלֶךָ

אִם־שׂוֹדֵדִי לַיְלָה אֵיךָ

נִדְמִיתָה הֲלוֹא יִגְנְבוּ דָיִם

## OBADIAH

<sup>1</sup> The vision of Obadiah. Thus says the Lord Yahweh about Edom:

I have received a message from Yahweh,  
a herald has been sent throughout the nations:

“Up! Let us march against this people. Into battle!”

<sup>2</sup> Look, I have reduced you to the smallest of nations;  
you are now beneath contempt.

<sup>3</sup> Your proud heart has misled you,  
you whose home is in the clefts of the Rock,  
who make the height your dwelling,  
who think, “Who can bring me down to earth?”

<sup>4</sup> Though you soar like an eagle,  
though you set your nest among the stars,  
I shall bring you down from there, says Yahweh!

<sup>5</sup> If thieves were to come to you, or robbers during the night,  
surely they would steal only as much as they wanted?  
How you have been pillaged!

## OBADIAH

<sup>1</sup> The *NJB* transposes ‘thus says the Lord Yahweh’ to the end of the verse, associating it with the beginning of v. 2.

<sup>2</sup> The time will come when Edom will in turn be despised for having gloated over Israel (v. 12); collapse will be the punishment for arrogance.

<sup>3</sup> The ‘Rock’ (סֶלַע) in which Edom is ensconced is a term probably chosen to suggesting the name of its capital, Ha-Sela (the meaning is reflected in the Greek name for the city, Petra).

<sup>4</sup> ‘You set’ follows the *LXX* (σῆς); the *MT* has ‘to set’ (שִׁים).

<sup>5</sup> The *NJB* transposes the 4<sup>th</sup> line (a gloss to harmonise the verse with Jr 49:9) to the end of the verse.

אִם־בְּצָרִים בָּאוּ לָךְ הֲלוֹא יִשְׁאֲרוּ עֲלֵלוֹת: אֵיךְ נִחְפְּשׂוּ עֲשׂוֹ נִבְעוּ מִצְפֹּנָיו: עַד־הַגְּבוּל שְׁלַחֲוֹךְ כָּל אַנְשֵׁי בְרִיתְךָ הַשִּׂיאֹוֹךְ יִכְלוּ לָךְ אַנְשֵׁי שְׁלָמְךָ לְחֶמְךָ יִשְׂיִמוּ מְזוֹר תַּחְתֶּיךָ אֵין תְּבוּנָה בּוֹ: הֲלוֹא בַיּוֹם הַהוּא נֹאֵם־יְהוָה וְהֵאֲבַדְתִּי חֲכָמִים מֵאֲדוֹם וְתְבוּנָה מֵהַר עֲשׂוֹ: וְחַתּוֹ גְּבוּרֶיךָ תִּימָן לְמַעַן יִכְרַת־אִישׁ מֵהַר עֲשׂוֹ מִקָּטָל: מִחֲמַס אַחֶיךָ יַעֲקֹב תִּכְסֶּךָ בּוֹשָׁה וְנִכְרַת לְעוֹלָם: בַּיּוֹם עֲמַדְךָ מִנֶּגֶד בַּיּוֹם שְׂבוֹת זָרִים חִילוּ	<p>If grape-pickers were to come to you, surely they would leave a few gleanings?</p> <p>6 How Esau has been looted, his hidden treasures routed out!</p> <p>7 Your allies all pursued you right to the frontier, your confederates kept you in suspense, then got the better of you, your own guests laid a trap for you, "He has quite lost his wits."</p> <p>8 When that day comes – declares Yahweh – shall I not eliminate sages from Edom and intelligence from Mount Esau?</p> <p>9 Your warriors, Teman, will be so demoralised that everyone from Mount Esau will be cut off.</p> <p>10 For the violent slaughter of your brother Jacob, shame will cover you and you will be annihilated forever.</p> <p>11 On the day, when you stood aloof while strangers carried off his riches,</p>
---	--

<sup>6</sup> Esau, Jacob's twin, was the father of the Edomites (Gn 25:30, 36:1).

<sup>7</sup> 'Your own guests' follows Ps 41:9; the MT has 'your bread'. 'Trap' translates a word (מְזוֹר) found only here; some emend to מְצוֹד ('snare').

<sup>8</sup> Here, and in vv. 9, 19 & 21, 'Mount Esau' translates a term for the mountainous country of Edom, also called 'Mount Seir'.

<sup>9</sup> For the last line, here following the NRSV (and MT), the NJB reads, "every one of Mount Esau will be massacred to the last one."

<sup>10</sup> In place of 'for the violent slaughter', the NJB has 'for the slaughter, for the violence'; the two expressions form a hendiadys.

<sup>11</sup> The 'day' was that on which the Chaldaeans entered the city (2K 25:3-4) or else that of the burning of the Temple (2K 25:8-9) in 587/6 BCE.

וְנִכְרִים בָּאוּ שְׁעָרוֹ  
 וְעַל־יְרוּשָׁלַם יָדוּ  
 גֹזְלִל גַּם־אֶתְהָ כַּאֲחַד מֵהֶם:  
 יב וְאַל־תִּרְא בְיוֹם־אָחִיךָ  
 בְּיוֹם נִכְרוֹ  
 וְאַל־תִּשְׂמַח לְבְנֵי־יְהוּדָה  
 בְּיוֹם אָבְדָם  
 וְאַל־תִּגְדֵּל פִּיךָ  
 בְּיוֹם צָרָה:  
 יג אַל־תָּבוֹא בְשַׁעֲרֵ־עַמִּי  
 בְּיוֹם אִיָּדָם  
 אַל־תִּרְא גַם־אֶתְהָ בְרַעְתּוֹ  
 בְּיוֹם אִיָּדוֹ  
 וְאַל־תִּשְׁלַחְנָה בְּחִילוֹ  
 בְּיוֹם אִיָּדוֹ:  
 יד וְאַל־תַּעֲמֵד עַל־הַפְּרָק לְהַכְרִית אֶת־פְּלִיטָיו  
 וְאַל־תִּסְגֵּר שְׂרִידָיו בְּיוֹם צָרָה:  
 טו כִּי־קָרוֹב יוֹם־יְהוָה עַל־כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם  
 כַּאֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ יַעֲשֶׂה לְךָ  
 גַּמְלָךְ יָשׁוּב בְּרֹאשְׁךָ:

while foreigners passed through his gate  
 and cast lots for Jerusalem,  
 you were as bad as the rest of them.

- 12 Do not feast your eyes on your brother on the day of his misfortune.  
 Do not gloat over the children of Judah on the day of their ruin.  
 Do not play the braggart on the day of distress.
- 13 Do not enter my people's gate on the day of their calamity.  
 Do not, you especially, feast your eyes on their suffering on the day of their distress.  
 Do not touch their possessions on the day of their distress.
- 14 Do not wait at the crossroads to annihilate their fugitives.  
 Do not hand over their survivors on the day of distress.
- 15 For, the Day of Yahweh is near for all the nations.  
 As you have done, so will it be done to you:  
 your deeds will recoil on your own head.

12 Before 'your brother', the MT adds 'the day of'.

13 The words 'calamity' (אִיָּדָם) and 'distress' (אִיָּדוֹ) form a wordplay on the name 'Edom'.

14 The meaning of פְּרָק ('crossroads') is uncertain; the word is found in the Hebrew Bible only here and in Na 3:1, where it means 'plunder'.

15 The *Lex Talionis* (see #Ex 21:25) is here applied to Edom.

טז כִּי בָאֲשֶׁר שָׁתִיתֶם עַל־הַר קֹדֶשׁי  
 יִשְׁתּוּ כָל־הַגּוֹיִם תָּמִיד וְשָׁתוּ  
 וְלָעוּ וְהָיוּ  
 כְּלֹא הָיוּ:  
 יז וּבְהַר צִיּוֹן תִּהְיֶה פְּלִיטָה  
 וְהָיָה קֹדֶשׁ  
 וְיָרְשׁוּ בֵּית יַעֲקֹב  
 אֶת מוֹרְשֵׁיהֶם:  
 יח וְהָיָה בֵּית־יַעֲקֹב אֵשׁ  
 וּבֵית יוֹסֵף לְהַבָּה  
 וּבֵית עֵשָׂו לְקֶשׁ  
 וְדָלְקוּ בָהֶם וְאָכְלוּם  
 וְלֹא־יִהְיֶה שְׂרִיד לְבֵית עֵשָׂו  
 כִּי יְהוָה דִּבֶּר:  
 יט וְיָרְשׁוּ הַנֶּגֶב אֶת־הַר עֵשָׂו  
 וְהִשְׁפִּילָה אֶת־פְּלִשְׁתִּים  
 וְיָרְשׁוּ אֶת־שְׂדֵה אֶפְרַיִם וְאֶת שְׂדֵה שִׁמְרֹן  
 וּבְנֵימָן אֶת־הַגִּלְעָד:

- 16 Just as you have drunk on my holy mountain,  
 so will all the nations drink continually,  
 they will drink, will drink greedily,  
 and will be as though they had not been!
- 17 However, on Mount Zion will be those who have escaped  
 – it will be a sanctuary –  
 and the House of Jacob will recover  
 what is rightfully theirs.
- 18 And the House of Jacob will be a fire,  
 and the House of Joseph a flame,  
 and the House of Esau as stubble:  
 and they will kindle and devour it,  
 and no one of the House of Esau will survive.  
 Yahweh has spoken.
- 19 People from the Negeb will occupy the Mount of Esau,  
 people from the lowlands the country of the Philistines;  
 they will occupy Ephraim and Samaria,  
 and Benjamin will occupy Gilead.

16 In place of 'drink greedily', some use the emended 'totter'. From here on, the prophet addresses the Israelites.

17 The text of the 1<sup>st</sup> line is cited in Jl 3:5 as a 'word of Yahweh'.

18 The 'House of Jacob' is Judah and the 'House of Joseph' is the Northern Kingdom, associated with Judah at the time of final salvation (see #Jr 3:18). The two kingdoms are to re-conquer (vv. 19–20) the empire of David, here defined in ideal terms (cf. 1K 8:65, 2K 14:25).

19 The translation of the first two lines is supported by the LXX (καὶ κατακληρονομήσουσιν οἱ ἐν Ναγεβ τὸ ὄρος τὸ Ησαυ καὶ οἱ ἐν τῇ Σεφηλα τοὺς ἀλλοφύλους); the MT could also be understood, "They will take possession of the Negeb, Mount Esau and the Philistine lowlands."

כ וּגְלַת הַחֲלֵהֶזָה לְבָנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל  
 אֲשֶׁר-כְּנַעַנִים עַד-צָרְפָּת  
 וּגְלַת יְרוּשָׁלַם אֲשֶׁר בְּסִפְרָד  
 יִרְשׁוּ אֶת עָרֵי הַנֶּגֶב:  
 כא וְעָלוּ מִזְשָׁעִים בְּהַר צִיּוֹן  
 לְשֹׁפֵט אֶת-הָר עֵשָׂו  
 וְהִיְתָה לַיהוָה הַמְּלוּכָה:  
 {ש}

20 The exiles of this army, the sons of Israel,  
 will have the Canaanites' land as far as Zarephath,  
 while the exiles from Jerusalem now in Sepharad  
 will have the cities of the Negeb.

21 Victorious, they will climb Mount Zion  
 to rule over Mount Esau,  
 and sovereignty will be Yahweh's!

20 'Will have' is a conjectural translation, in line with the rest of the verse; the MT has 'who' (אֲשֶׁר).

21 'Victorious' (literally 'the saved') is a conjectural translation; the MT has 'the saviours'. The final line is the triumphal slogan of Israelite eschatology (Ps 22:27, 103:19, 145:11-13, cf. Ps 10:16, 47:7, 93:1, 97:1, 99:1). The rule of Israel is the rule of Yahweh and the fulfilment of history.