
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 4th among the 12 'Minor Prophets' but, in the *Septuagint*, it is 5th, coming after Micah & Joel. Text from the book appears in only one of the *Qumran MSS* – 4QXII^g.

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 2nd Century BCE, the 12 books of the Minor Prophets constituted a unit (see Si 49:10).

עובדיה

חֲזֹן עֲבַדִּיָּה כֹה־אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוֹה לְאֶדוֹם

שְׁמוּעָה שָׁמַעְנוּ מֵאֵת יְהוֹה
וְצִיר בְּגוֹיִם שָׁלַח קוֹמוּ
וְנִקְוָמָה עָלֶיהָ לְמִלְחָמָה:
הִנֵּה קֹטֵן נִתְתִּיד בְּגוֹיִם
בְּזוֹי אַתָּה מְאֹד:
זֶדוֹן לִבְךָ הִשְׁיֵאֲךָ
שָׁכְנִי בְּחַגְוֵי־סֹלַע מְרוֹם שְׁבָתוֹ
אָמַר בְּלִבּוֹ
מִי יוֹרֵדְנִי אֶרֶץ:
אֶסְתַּגְּבִיָּה כַּנֶּשֶׁר
וְאֶסְבִּין כּוֹכָבִים שָׁיִם קִנְיָךְ
מִשָּׁם אוֹרִידְךָ נֶאֱסִי־הוֹה:
אֶסְגַּנְבִּים בְּאוֹלְךָ
אֶסְשׁוֹדְדִי לַיְלָה אֵיד
נִדְמִיתָה הֲלוֹא יִגְנְבוּ דִים

OBADIAH

¹ 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!"
² Look, I have reduced you to the smallest of nations;
you are now beneath contempt.
³ 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?"
⁴ Though you soar like an eagle,
though you set your nest among the stars,
I shall bring you down from there, says Yahweh!
⁵ 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

- ¹ The NJB transposes 'thus says the Lord Yahweh' to the end of the verse, associating it with the beginning of v. 2.
² 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.
³ The 'Rock' (סֹלַע) 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).
⁴ 'You set' follows the LXX (ἔθετο); the MT has 'to set' (שָׁיִם).
⁵ The NJB transposes the fourth line (a gloss to harmonise the verse with Jr 49:9) to the end of the verse.

אִם-בָּצָרִים בָּאוּ לָךְ הֲלוֹא יִשְׁאֲרוּ עֲלֵלוֹת: אֵיךְ נִחְפְּשׁוּ עֲשׂו נִבְעוּ מִצְפָּנָיו: עַד-הַגְּבוּל שְׁלַחוּךָ כָּל אֲנָשֵׁי בְרִיתְךָ הַשִּׂיאוּךָ יָכְלוּ לָךְ אֲנָשֵׁי שְׁלָמְךָ לַחֲמֶךָ יִשְׁיִמוּ מִזֹּר תַּחְתֶּיךָ אֵין תְּבוּנָה בּוֹ: הֲלוֹא בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא נֹאם-יְהוָה וְהָאֲבֹדְתִי חֲכָמִים מֵאֲדוֹם וְתְבוּנָה מִהָר עֲשׂו: וְחָתוּ גְבוּרֶיךָ תִּימָן לְמַעַן יִכָּרֶת-אִישׁ מִהָר עֲשׂו מִקָּטָל: מִחֲמַס אַחֶיךָ יַעֲקֹב תִּכְסֶּךָ בּוֹשָׁה וְנִכְרַת לְעוֹלָם: בַּיּוֹם עָמַדְךָ מֵנָּגֵד בַּיּוֹם שְׁבוֹת זָרִים חִילוּ	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11
If grape-pickers were to come to you, surely they would leave a few gleanings? How Esau has been looted, his hidden treasures routed out! 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." When that day comes – declares Yahweh – shall I not eliminate sages from Edom and intelligence from Mount Esau? Your warriors, Teman, will be so demoralised that everyone from Mount Esau will be cut off. For the violent slaughter of your brother Jacob, shame will cover you and you will be annihilated forever. On the day, when you stood aloof while strangers carried off his riches,	6 7 8 9 10 11

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

⁷ 'Your own guests' follows Ps 41:9; the MT has 'your bread'. 'Trap' translates a word (מִזֹּר) found only here; some emend to מִצִּיד ('snare').

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

⁹ 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."

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

¹¹ The 'day' was that on which the Chaldeans 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
גִזְלָל גַּם־אֶתָּה כְּאֶחָד מֵהֶם:
וְאַל־תִּרְא בְיוֹם־אֲחִיךָ יב
בְּיוֹם נִכְרוֹ
וְאַל־תִּשְׁמַח לִבְנֵי־יְהוּדָה
בְּיוֹם אֲבָדָם
וְאַל־תִּגְדֵּל פִּיךָ
בְּיוֹם צָרָה:
אֲל־תָּבוֹא בְשַׁעֲרֵ־עַמִּי יג
בְּיוֹם אִידָם
אֲל־תִּרְא גַם־אֶתָּה בְּרַעְתּוֹ
בְּיוֹם אִידוֹ
וְאַל־תִּשְׁלַחְנָה בְּחִילוֹ
בְּיוֹם אִידוֹ:
וְאַל־תַּעֲמֵד עַל־הַפֶּרֶק לְהַכְרִית אֶת־פְּלִיטָיו יד
וְאַל־תִּסְגֹּר שְׁרִידָיו בְּיוֹם צָרָה:
כִּי־קָרוֹב יוֹם־יְהוָה עַל־כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם טו
כַּאֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ יַעֲשֶׂה לָּךְ
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' (אִידָם) and 'distress' (אִידוֹ) form a wordplay on the name 'Edom'.

14 The meaning of פֶּרֶק ('crossroads') is uncertain; the word is found in the OT 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 שְׁתִּיתֶם עַל־הַר קֹדֶשׁ
 יִשְׁתּוּ כָל־הַגּוֹיִם תָּמִיד וְשָׁתוּ
 וְלָעוּ וְהָיוּ
 כְּלוֹא הָיוּ:
 יז וּבְהָר צִיּוֹן תִּהְיֶה פְּלִיטָה
 וְהָיָה קֹדֶשׁ
 וִירְשׁוּ בֵּית יַעֲקֹב
 אֶת מוֹרְשֵׁיהֶם:
 יח וְהָיָה בֵּית־יַעֲקֹב אֵשׁ
 וּבֵית יוֹסֵף לֶהֱבֶה
 וּבֵית עֵשָׂו לִקְשׁ
 וְדָלְקוּ בָהֶם וְאָכְלוּם
 וְלֹא־יִהְיֶה שְׂרִיד לְבֵית עֵשָׂו
 כִּי יְהוָה דִּבֶּר:
 יט וִירְשׁוּ הַנֶּגֶב אֶת־הָהָר עֵשָׂו
 וְהִשְׁפִּילָה אֶת־פְּלִשְׁתִּים
 וִירְשׁוּ אֶת־שְׂדֵה אֶפְרַיִם וְאֶת שְׂדֵה שִׁמְרֹן
 וּבְנִימָן 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 1st 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 הַחֲלִיָּה לְבָנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
 אֲשֶׁר־כְּנַעֲנִים עַד־צֶרֶפֶת
 וּגְלַת יְרוּשָׁלַם אֲשֶׁר בְּסֶפֶרֶד
 יִרְשׁוּ אֶת עָרֵי הַנֶּגֶב:
 כא וְעָלוּ מִזְשָׁעִים בְּהָר 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, 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.