

Mining the Minor Prophets

Obadiah

Adult Sunday
School
Truro Church
Fall 2026



*I will search
Jerusalem with
lamps ...*

Zephaniah 1:12

Who

- * Obadiah = “servant/worshipper of Yahweh”
- * A number of “Obadiahs” in the OT
- * Could be a generic reference like Luke’s “Theophilus”
- * No good candidates for a person or background identifiable here.

When

- * Most commonly believed to originate in the wake of the final Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem, so not long after 586 BC.
- * Babylonian conquest had three stages.
 - * 605 – Vassalage (Jehoiakim)
 - * 597 – First deportation (Jehoiachin)
 - * 586 – Second deportation and destruction of Jerusalem (Zedekiah)
- * Klein thinks it originates in mid-800s BC with reign of Jehoram, when attacked by Philistines and Arabs. Minority view.

What

- * Prophecy of retribution upon Edom – Jacob's/Israel's “brother” tribe.
- * When Judah was destroyed by Babylon/Nebuchadnezzar, Edom took advantage of the disaster to both enrich themselves with looting, gloating over Judah's misfortune, and even helping the Babylonians.
- * Prophecy of restoration for Judah
- * See also Psa 137:7, Eze 25 12-15, Eze 35, Lam 4

Who are the Edomites

- * Descendents of “Esau”, older twin brother of Jacob, who was tricked out of his inheritance by Jacob’s and his mother’s scheming.
- * God restricted covenant participation to Jacob’s line (pure election!)
- * Genesis 25:20-28 Note- “the elder shall serve the younger”
- * Edom often geographically referenced as “Mt. Seir”
- * Obadiah uses “Mount Esau” to keep the familial connection front and center. Similarly, Jacob for Judah (3 of 4).

Where is Edom?

- * Edom is situated to the south-east of Judah. South of Moab and the Dead Sea and east of the Negeb (or Negev) desert.
- * A mostly arid environment and adjacent to Arabian tribes to its south.
- * Includes “Petra”, the remarkable chiseled-out temples built later.

Outline

- * V 1-9 Opening Prophecy of Retribution
- * V 10-14 + 15b Edom's sins against Judah
- * V 15a-16 The "Day of the Lord" against the heathen
- * V 17-21 Restoration of the "Kingdom of the Lord"

A Messenger Is Sent

- * Verse 1 - A messenger from the Lord calling to the nations “Rise up for battle”
- * This call is going out generally to the nations round-about to come and execute the Lord’s vengeance on Edom.
- * It effectively resolves to Babylon, which will later destroy Edom.

You Have No Defense

- * V 2-4 “living in the “clefts of the rocks”
- * The Edomites had unusually strong defensive resources in some of their terrain. High steep cliffs and mountain hideaways.
- * Even heights as of eagles or even of “the stars” would not be sufficient for protection against the wrath of YHWH, much less mere rocky defiles.

Destruction from Every Direction

* V 5-9

* The destruction will be worse than even thieves would do.

* Allies deceive you / friends plot against you

* Wisdom fails you (Edom had a “wisdom” tradition.)

* Mighty men can’t protect you

* Ends ominously on the word “slaughter”

The Charges (v10-14 + 15b)

- * On the **day** that **strangers** carried off his wealth ...
you were like one of **them**.
- * **Do not** gloat over the **day** of your **brother** in the day of his misfortune;
- * **Do not** rejoice over the people of Judah in the **day** of their ruin;
- * **Do not** boast in the **day** of distress.
- * **Do not** enter the gate of my people in the **day** of their calamity;
- * **Do not** gloat over his disaster in the **day** of his calamity;
- * **Do not** loot his wealth in the **day** of his calamity.
- * **Do not** stand at the crossroads to cut off his fugitives;
- * **Do not** hand over his survivors in the **day** of distress.
- * As you have **done to THEM**, it shall be **done to YOU**

The Legal Argument

- * Edom's crime: Beyond the cruelty of their actions, they have perpetrated them on a **brother** (nation),
- * The sentence – "as you **have done**, it **will be done** to you" (v.15b) – is **lex talionis**, Torah's court rule for justice *between persons*.
- * This is **person-to-person justice**, applied in a **nation-to-nation** context.
- * Unusual for the genre – only Amos 1:11 touches briefly.

The “Cup of Wrath”

- * Verses 15a + 16-17 The cosmic “**Day of the Lord**” motif applied in detail to the current situation but expanded beyond just Edom (universalized).
- * Judah has had to drink a cup of wrath but will recover and be secure.
- * “The nations” round-about will also drink, but fatally.
 - * Isa. 51:22-23

Jacob's Restoration -> Edom's Destruction

- * V 18 - Mount Zion will regather the people to holy assembly, back in control of their land.
- * “Jacob” a fire, along with “Joseph” (Israel), a flame, to consume Edom completely.
- * How does Israel get into this act?? Likely an expansive reference to the historic nation as a whole vs Edom.

Recovery of Territory

- * V19 -21 Are textually difficult. In general, it maps recovery across different groups and areas, but commentary and translations are “varied” on this section.
- * Southern Judah (Negeb), to claim Edom
- * Those in the Judean “lowlands” (the Shephelah) acquire land of the Philistines (coastal), and lands to the north (Samaria)
- * “Benjamin” acquires Gilead (in trans-jordan)

Recovery of Territory cont.

- * Some captives from the Assyrian exile held in “**Halah**” (see 2Ki 17:6) return to acquire lands up to Zarephath (RSV rendering).
- * Judaeans captive in **Sepharad** (unknown) would return to reassert control in the south (Negeb)
- * The wrap up declares “Zion rules Edom”, and “**the Kingdom shall be the Lord’s**”! (brackets “Day of the Lord”)

“**Sepharad**” is an unknown placename. Interesting point that at a later time there surfaced an idea that it referred to a destination in Spain. This even later resulted in the Jewish community in Spain being known as “Sephardic”.

Prophetic Contrast

- * This sweeping language appears to be for the purpose of contrast to the Edomite doom, with the benefits spread across the Jacobite tribes.
Edom – DOWN, Jacob – UP.
- * The specific events called out for Jacob, did not happen in the manner envisioned by the specific language.

Israelite/Edomite History

- * Gen 25 – The struggle in the Rebekah’s womb. “The older shall serve the younger”
- * Gen 33 - Jacob and Esau reconcile (well, sort of)
- * Num 20:17-20 Exodus, Edom blocks the way north, Moses instructed to go around them. Deut. 2:4-8 (“the territory of your brothers”)
- * 1Sam 14:47 Edom listed as an “enemy” among those “routed” by Saul
- * 2Sam 8:13-14 David kills 18,000, installs garrisons (11/10th century)

Israelite/Edomite History – cont.

- * 1Kings 11:14-17 Records Joab (under David) “struck down every male in Edom” which caused a later (undocumented) problem for Solomon. Likely an uprising of some sort in Edom.
- * 2Chron 25:11-12 Amaziah kills 10,000 and executes another 10,000. (8th century)
- * 150 year gap (approx.) between the above, and Babylonian disaster.

Post-Obadiah History

- * Very soon after Judah's exile, Edomites began trickling into Negeb/South Judah.
- * Edom is destroyed about 30 years after Judah's defeat. End of Edom as a national entity. (Babylonian archives of Nabonidus, father of Belshazzar of Daniel fame.)
- * Gradually, Edomites migrated further north into Judah under pressure from the Arab Nabateans
- * Edomite region coalesced in south Judah and was later called "Idumea" (which is Greek for Edom). As far as Hebron.



Post-Obadiah – cont.

- * Hasmonean John Hyrcanus conquered Idumea, and forced conversion to Judaism (2nd century BC) (per Josephus)
- * The Romans installed Herod (later “the Great”), as King of the Jews. (who’s serving who now?)
- * Post AD 70/130 revolts, the Idumean identity faded away, finally assimilated into the larger Jewish community.

Obadiah's Theological Contribution?

- * It's the **only sustained assertion** in the OT regarding an on-going obligation of brotherhood.
- * How important is this in the OT moral universe, which already in Torah introduces “as yourself” moral logic, trumping “as your brother”.

Nations vs. Persons

- * Its most striking element is its use of “**personal**” moral categories in a prophecy directed at a “**nation**”.
- * Lev 24:19-20 If anyone injures his neighbor, as he has done it shall be done to him, fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; whatever injury he has given a person shall be given to him
- * This moral grounding assumes adjudication in “**both directions**”!
- * **Such an approach does not get this kind of explicit application in a national context prior to Obadiah.**

Theological Contributions cont.

- * While Obadiah is using “talionis” as an attack, it opens a door that “humanizes” even the enemy nation: a trajectory that reaches its culmination in teachings of Jesus. (e.g. Matt. 7:1-5)
- * Taking Obadiah seriously gives us some pause when we consider how the Judahites had treated the Edomites over the centuries. Should it?