

Obadiah

*“Those who have been saved shall go up to Mount Zion to rule Mount Esau;
and the kingdom shall be the LORD’S.” (OBADIAH 1:21)*

Obadiah, whose name means “worshiper of Yahweh,” preached in Judah with a message directed primarily against Edom as vindication for Judah’s suffering. Nothing is known of his personal life. The historical contours of his oracle can be sketched with some measure of clarity as the book seems to reflect the trauma surrounding Babylon’s assaults on Jerusalem following Judah’s revolts under Jehoiakim in 601 BCE and Zedekiah in 587 BCE. In those crises, Edom materially and politically aided Babylon, participating in the plunder of Jerusalem, blocking fleeing refugees, and betraying survivors—an act of treachery remembered bitterly in texts like Psalm 137.

On the other end of the spectrum, the preaching must precede the Nabatean conquest of Edom in 312 BCE, since Edom remains a functioning political entity in the oracle. A setting during the early post-exilic period—when Judahites were repatriating and Edomites were being expelled from southern Judah in the late sixth to fifth centuries—fits both the historical tensions and the theological tone. Obadiah’s message arises from this moment of national vulnerability, interpreting Edom’s betrayal as a violation of kinship and covenantal obligation.

Obadiah is remarkable for its compactness. In twenty-one verses, the prophet moves from a sharply focused judgment oracle against Edom (vv. 1–14) to a widened horizon in which the Day of the Lord encompasses all nations (vv. 15–21). The closing vision of restored Zion, holiness, and renewed Davidic rule transforms a national grievance into a theological proclamation: God’s sovereignty orders history, vindicates the oppressed, and gathers the faithful into a restored community.

AN ALTERNATIVE SETTING

Though less popular among scholars, an alternative proposal situates Obadiah much earlier, interpreting the book as a response to Edom’s rebellion against Jehoram of Judah (853–841 BCE). In this view, Obadiah would be a contemporary of Elisha, addressing Edom’s revolt and Judah’s humiliation as described in 2 Kings 8 and 2 Chronicles 21.

THEMATIC & LITERARY CONSIDERATIONS

Essau & Edom — Obadiah’s central theme is God’s judgment on Edom for betraying its kin-nation Judah. Although descended from the twin brothers Esau and Jacob, Edom repeatedly opposed Israel—refusing passage during the exodus and engaging in persistent conflicts throughout the monarchy. This long history of hostility set the stage for Edom’s climactic treachery in the sixth century BCE, when it stood aloof and even benefited from Babylon’s

destruction of Jerusalem. Obadiah interprets these actions as violations of familial and covenantal obligation, exposing Edom's pride, violence, and opportunism. The prophet frames Edom's downfall as a moral reversal under the Day of the Lord, where divine justice vindicates Judah, restores right order, and reasserts God's sovereignty over the nations.

The Day of the Lord — Obadiah broadens his oracle from Edom to the nations through the motif of the Day of the Lord—a moment of decisive divine intervention that exposes human arrogance, overturns oppression, and restores right order. Edom's betrayal becomes the paradigm case: its downfall signals how divine judgment will move outward from Judah's immediate offender to all peoples who embody similar pride and violence. In Obadiah's vision, the "day" is not merely a future catastrophe but the passage of God's wrath from Edom to the wider world, culminating in Israel's vindication. The prophet thus transforms a local grievance into a universal proclamation of God's sovereign justice.

The Remnant — A key motif in Obadiah is reversal: the harm Edom inflicted on Judah returns upon its own head. The proud are humbled, the violent undone by violence, and those who exploited Judah face the collapse they engineered. Obadiah presents history as morally ordered under God's sovereignty, where arrogance inevitably meets divine justice.

The book's closing vision shifts from judgment to renewal. A faithful remnant is preserved, Zion is restored, its borders widened, and its people re-established in holiness. The final note is not vengeance but the reassertion of God's kingdom in justice and peace—a world set right as divine rule is fully manifest.

TYPOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

SELECTED USES OF OBADIAH IN THE IMAGINATION OF EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITERS

Obadiah is never explicitly quoted in the New Testament, and early Christian writers rarely cite it directly. Yet its themes, images, and theological grammar echo widely. Obadiah's vision of the Day of the Lord—a moment of divine intervention that reverses human arrogance and vindicates God's people—resonates strongly in the New Testament. Texts like 1 Thessalonians 5, 2 Peter 3, and Revelation develop this same eschatological imagination: God will judge the nations, overthrow the proud, and restore his kingdom. Obadiah's universalizing of judgment (1:15) becomes a building block for Christian eschatology

Obadiah's closing vision of a holy remnant and a restored Zion (1:17–21) aligns with New Testament themes of a faithful community preserved by God (Rom 11; Rev 14). Early Christian interpreters read Obadiah typologically: Zion's restoration prefigures the Church's gathering and the final reign of Christ.

Early Christian writers treated Obadiah as part of the prophetic chorus anticipating Christ's kingdom. Its images of judgment, reversal, and restored holiness were woven into homilies on divine justice and eschatology.

MORAL IMAGINATION

QUESTIONS TO HELP DISCOVER OBADIAH'S RELEVANCE TO THE CONTEMPORARY READER

- How does Obadiah's indictment of Edom illuminate the moral weight of betraying those with whom we share history, covenant, or kinship? Where do we see similar dynamics today?
- In what ways does Judah's long memory of conflict with Edom shape the tone of the prophecy? How does collective memory influence our own communities?
- "As you have done, it shall be done to you." How do we understand this principle in light of Christian teachings on mercy, forgiveness, and accountability?
- How does Obadiah's vision of a preserved remnant speak to communities experiencing decline, transition, or renewal?
- Where might Obadiah's themes—betrayal, justice, reversal, restoration—intersect with the moral and social challenges facing the Church today?

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