

Obadiah — The Prophet Against Edom’s Pride

Series: 30 Prophets of the Bible - Dr. Randy White

I. Identity of Obadiah

Name and Known Facts

- “Obadiah” (Hebrew: עֲבַדְיָהּ, *Ovadyah*) means “servant of the LORD” or “worshiper of the LORD.”
- Scripture gives no father, hometown, tribe, occupation, king, or date.
- Obadiah 1:1 simply says, “The vision of Obadiah.”
- “Obadiah” was a common biblical name; this prophet should not automatically be identified with every other Obadiah in Scripture.

The Tradition About Ahab’s Steward

- Jewish tradition identifies the prophet with Obadiah, the governor of Ahab’s house, who hid one hundred prophets from Jezebel (1 Kings 18:3–4).
- That tradition is memorable: a man who lived among Ahab and Jezebel but did not learn their ways was chosen to prophesy against Edom, descended from Esau, who lived near Isaac and Rebekah but did not learn their ways.
- The identification is possible as tradition, but the book itself does not prove it.

II. Historical Setting

The Target: Edom

- Edom descended from Esau, Jacob’s brother (Gen. 25:30; 36:1).
- Obadiah’s burden is not against a distant pagan nation only, but against a brother-nation that acted violently toward Jacob (Obad. 10).
- Edom’s mountain territory made it feel secure: “thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock” (1:3).

Timeframe

- Obadiah is difficult to date because no king is named.
- Two major options:
 - An earlier setting during the Philistine-Arabian raid in Jehoram’s reign (2 Chron. 21:16–17).
 - A later setting connected with Babylon’s destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC.
- The later date is textually strong because Obadiah 11 mentions strangers entering Jerusalem’s gates, foreigners casting lots, and Edom standing on the other side.
- Psalm 137:7, Lamentations 4:21–22, Ezekiel 25:12–14, and Ezekiel 35 also remember Edom’s hostility in Judah’s calamity.

III. Nature of Obadiah’s Ministry

Primary Message

- Edom will be judged for pride, violence, betrayal, and cruelty toward Judah.
- The day of the LORD is near upon all nations (1:15).
- Mount Zion will receive deliverance, holiness, possession, and kingdom hope (1:17, 21).

The Sin of Edom

- Pride: Edom trusted its height, fortresses, and geography (1:3–4).
- Treachery: allies would deceive and overpower Edom (1:7).
- Violence against a brother: “For thy violence against thy brother Jacob shame shall cover thee” (1:10).
- Opportunism: Edom did not merely watch Judah fall; Edom rejoiced, entered, looted, blocked escape routes, and delivered survivors (1:12–14).

Tone and Style

- Shortest book in the Old Testament, but not small in force.

- A compact judgment oracle with sharp reversals: high becomes low, wise men perish, mighty men are dismayed, and the dispossessed possess.
- The book moves from Edom’s hidden mountain pride to the LORD’s public kingdom.

IV. Major Themes

The Deception of Pride

- Edom said in his heart, “Who shall bring me down to the ground?” (1:3).
- God’s answer is direct: “I will bring thee down” (1:4).
- The issue is not merely arrogance in attitude, but misplaced security against the word of God.

Brotherly Betrayal

- The word “brother” makes the indictment heavier (1:10, 12).
- Edom’s guilt is not only that it harmed Judah, but that it exploited covenant-family calamity.
- Obadiah exposes the sin of standing safely aside while a brother is crushed.

The Day of the LORD

- Obadiah 15 widens the message: “the day of the LORD is near upon all the heathen.”
- Edom becomes a test case for all nations.
- The rule is moral recompense: “as thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee” (1:15).

Zion and the Kingdom

- Judgment is not the final word.
- “Upon mount Zion shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness” (1:17).
- The book ends with a kingdom statement: “and the kingdom shall be the LORD’s” (1:21).

V. Structure of the Book

Obadiah 1–9 – Edom’s Pride Brought Down

- The nations are summoned against Edom (1:1).
- Edom’s high dwelling and eagle-like confidence cannot protect it from God (1:3–4).
- Thieves and grape gatherers would leave something behind, but Edom’s ruin will be searched out completely (1:5–6).
- Edom’s allies, wisdom, and mighty men will fail (1:7–9).

Obadiah 10–14 – Edom’s Violence Against Jacob

- The central charge: violence against “thy brother Jacob” (1:10).
- Edom stood aloof when foreigners entered Jerusalem (1:11).
- The repeated “thou shouldest not” clauses expose Edom’s progressive guilt: looking, rejoicing, boasting, entering, looting, blocking fugitives, and delivering survivors (1:12–14).

Obadiah 15–21 – The Day of the LORD and Zion’s Possession

- The day of the LORD turns Edom’s own conduct back upon its head (1:15–16).
- Mount Zion becomes the place of deliverance and holiness (1:17).
- Jacob and Joseph become a consuming fire against Esau’s stubble (1:18).
- The final vision expands from local judgment to restored possession and divine rule: “the kingdom shall be the LORD’s” (1:21).

VI. Why Obadiah Matters

Interpretive Value

- Obadiah is the Bible’s most concentrated prophetic word against Edom.
- It connects Genesis family conflict, Judah’s historical calamity, and the prophetic day of the LORD.
- Its “wow” factor is its scale: twenty-one verses move from the cliffs of Edom to the kingdom of the LORD.
- The book warns that neutrality during a brother’s disaster can become participation in the evil.