OBADIAH

*Judgment on Edom for the betrayal of Israel*

TIME PERIOD

Sometime between 586 BC and 553 BC

KEY VERSE

*"Because of the violence against your brother Jacob, you will be covered with shame; you will be destroyed forever. On the day you stood aloof while strangers carried off his wealth and foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem, you were like one of them."*

v. 10-11

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**CONTENTS**

[Introduction](#_Toc136250837)  [2](#_Toc136250837)

[Israel vs. Edom](#_Toc136250838)  [2](#_Toc136250838)

[Petra](#_Toc136250839)  [3](#_Toc136250839)

[Dating of Obadiah](#_Toc136250840)  [3](#_Toc136250840)

[Previous judgment against Edom](#_Toc136250841)  [4](#_Toc136250841)

[Jer 49:7-22](#_Toc136250842)  [4](#_Toc136250842)

[Obadiah](#_Toc136250843)  [5](#_Toc136250843)

[Why will Edom be judged? (v. 9-10)](#_Toc136250844)  [6](#_Toc136250844)

[Joel](#_Toc136250845)  [6](#_Toc136250845)

[Obadiah](#_Toc136250846)  [6](#_Toc136250846)

[Obadiah v. 12-14](#_Toc136250847)  [6](#_Toc136250847)

[Verse 15 → universal](#_Toc136250848)  [7](#_Toc136250848)

[What happened to Edom?](#_Toc136250849)  [7](#_Toc136250849)

[Verses 16-18](#_Toc136250850)  [7](#_Toc136250850)

[Verses 19-20](#_Toc136250851)  [8](#_Toc136250851)

[Verse 21](#_Toc136250852)  [8](#_Toc136250852)

[Obadiah, Jesus and us](#_Toc136250853)  [9](#_Toc136250853)

# Introduction

Obadiah is the shortest book in the Old Testament, and it is about God's judgment on Edom, one of Israel's neighboring countries that was located in today's Jordan. We saw a small hint of this in Lamentations 4:21-22, where it says that Edom can rejoice now that Jerusalem lies in ruins, but that they too would be judged.

The Edomites were descendants of Esau, the brother of Jacob, who was named Israel, after whom the entire nation was named. But even though Edom and Israel were originally brothers through Esau and Jacob, they are never good friends in the Bible. When the Babylonians attacked Jerusalem, the Edomites did nothing to help Israel. Instead, they joined forces with the Babylonians, rejoiced, and exploited it to their advantage (vv. 12-13). In v. 14, it even sounds like they killed those who tried to flee and handed the survivors over to the Babylonians. Although the judgment was indeed from God, this was a total betrayal by the Edomites. Therefore, v. 10 says that they are judged because of the violence against their brother Jacob. The judgment probably occurred in 553 BC, when the Babylonians took Edom as well.

In v. 15, it becomes universal, where the day of the Lord is said to be near for all peoples, and Edom seems to become an example of how God will judge the whole world.

Jesus barely enters the picture from v. 17, which is about the restoration of Israel when they will recapture land, which seems to have happened in the 2nd century BC. However, since more universal language has already been used in the verses before, it is also possible that there is something more in these verses, especially in the last sentence: *"And the kingdom will be the Lord’s."* God's kingdom came when Jesus came, and the recaptured land points to the fact that the whole earth will one day belong to God.

## Israel vs. Edom

Jacob vs. Esau (Genesis 25-27)

The Edomites did not allow Israel to pass through their land (Numbers 20:14-21).

Saul attacks and wins over Edom (1 Sam 14:47).

David subdues Edom (2 Sam 8:11-14).

Edom seceded from Judah under Jehoram (853-842 BC, 2 Kings 8:20-22).

Amaziah (796-767 BC) recaptured Edom and took the capital, Sela (2 Kings 14:7).

Edom defeated Judah under Ahaz (732-716 BC) and took prisoners of war (2 Chron. 28:17).

## Petra

"Sela" was probably the capital and means "mountain" in Hebrew (v. 4). This was translated as "Petra" in the LXX.

Today's Petra is younger. Later, it became the capital of the Nabataeans. It is located 50 km south of Sela. Petra is nevertheless a picture of Edom's natural fortresses.

Theme: Mountains (8x): Esau's mountain vs. Zion.

## Dating of Obadiah

**8th century:**

Obadiah stands among the oldest prophetic books. Obadiah 1:11-14 refers to battles between Judah and Edom under Jehoram (853-842). But is the order chronological? The "Book of the Twelve Prophets" has the same structure as the three greatest prophets: Judgment - nations - salvation. Obadiah should then have been placed first as the only prophet in the 8th century. And in the 7th century, it is difficult to find events that fit with 1:11-14.

**5th century:**

The destruction of Jerusalem in 586 is the clearest event where Judah was attacked and where there are signs that the Edomites were involved.

*"Remember, Lord, what the Edomites did on the day Jerusalem fell. “Tear it down,” they cried, “tear it down to its foundations!"* Psalm 137:7

*"You also vowed to build the temple, which the Edomites burned when Judea was laid waste by the Chaldeans."* 1 Esdras 4:45

Obadiah probably comes after Amos because of the verbal link from Amos 9:12: *"so that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations that bear my name,” declares the Lord, who will do these things."* Amos ends by mentioning Edom, while Obadiah only talks about Edom. Obadiah probably comes after Joel as well (with which there are several similarities), to elaborate on the Edom theme.

## Previous words of judgment against Edom

**7th century:**

Amos 1: To be judged because they chased their brothers with the sword, showed no mercy, and always held their grudge. (Fulfilled 711 BC)

Isaiah 34: Edom represents "anti-Israel" and thus all nations' opposition to what God is doing in the world. Symbolizes universal judgment.

Isa 63:1-6: Judgment on Edom represents God's judgment on all nations to redeem God's people.

Joel 3:24 (Uncertain, since Joel is hard to date): Shall become a desolate desert because of violence against Judah and because they spilled innocent blood in their lands.

Jer 49:7-22 (627-582): Judgment is coming.

**5th century (same accusation as Obadiah):**

Ezekiel 25:12-14: To be judged because they took revenge on Judah.

Ezekiel 35: To be judged because they delivered Israel to the sword due to old enmity (v. 5), wanted to take Israel and Judah's territories (v. 10), and rejoiced over Israel's destruction (v. 15).

Lamentations 4:21-22: Edom can rejoice and be glad now, but the punishment will reach them too.

The colored parts in the two paragraphs below indicate similarities between Jeremiah and Obadiah.

### Jer 49:7-22

*"Concerning Edom: This is what the Lord Almighty says: “Is there no longer wisdom in Teman? Has counsel perished from the prudent? Has their wisdom decayed? Turn and flee, hide in deep caves, you who live in Dedan, for I will bring disaster on Esau at the time when I punish him. If grape pickers came to you, would they not leave a few grapes? If thieves came during the night, would they not steal only as much as they wanted? But I will strip Esau bare; I will uncover his hiding places, so that he cannot conceal himself. His armed men are destroyed, also his allies and neighbors, so there is no one to say, ‘Leave your fatherless children; I will keep them alive. Your widows too can depend on me.’” This is what the Lord says: “If those who do not deserve to drink the cup must drink it, why should you go unpunished? You will not go unpunished, but must drink it. I swear by myself,” declares the Lord, “that Bozrah will become a ruin and a curse, an object of horror and reproach; and all its towns will be in ruins forever.” I have heard a message from the Lord; an envoy was sent to the nations to say, “Assemble yourselves to attack it! Rise up for battle!” “Now I will make you small among the nations, despised by mankind. The terror you inspire and the pride of your heart have deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rocks, who occupy the heights of the hill. Though you build your nest as high as the eagle’s, from there I will bring you down,” declares the Lord."* Jer 49:7-15

### Obadiah

*"The vision of Obadiah. This is what the Sovereign Lord says about Edom— We have heard a message from the Lord: An envoy was sent to the nations to say, “Rise, let us go against her for battle”— “See, I will make you small among the nations; you will be utterly despised. The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rocks and make your home on the heights, you who say to yourself, ‘Who can bring me down to the ground?’ Though you soar like the eagle and make your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down,” declares the Lord. “If thieves came to you, if robbers in the night— oh, what a disaster awaits you!— would they not steal only as much as they wanted? If grape pickers came to you, would they not leave a few grapes? But how Esau will be ransacked, his hidden treasures pillaged! All your allies will force you to the border; your friends will deceive and overpower you; those who eat your bread will set a trap for you, but you will not detect it. “In that day,” declares the Lord, “will I not destroy the wise men of Edom, those of understanding in the mountains of Esau?"* vv. 1-8

*"Just as you drank on my holy hill, so all the nations will drink continually; they will drink and drink and be as if they had never been."* v. 16

Obadiah probably brings up again Jeremiah's prophecy: The nations will go to war against Edom and fulfill the last prophetic words against them.

Reversal #1: From high to low (v. 4). The proud will be humbled.

Reversal #2: They will be weakened by their allies, as they themselves have weakened Judah. (v. 7)

# Why will Edom be judged? (vv. 9-10)

Because of his murder and violence against his brother Jacob.

Jacob = all of Israel and probably refers back to all previous enmity, not just against Judah in 586.

## Joel

1:15 *"Alas for that day! For the day of the Lord is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty."*

2:1b *"…for the day of the Lord is coming. It is close at hand"*

3:5 *"for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the Lord has said,"*

3:4 *"If you are paying me back, I will swiftly and speedily return on your own heads what you have done."*

3:7b *"I will return on your own heads what you have done."*

3:17 *"Then you will know that I, the Lord your God, dwell in Zion, my holy hill. Jerusalem will be holy; never again will foreigners invade her."*

3:19 *"But Egypt will be desolate, Edom a desert waste, because of violence done to the people of Judah"*

## Obadiah

v. 10 "Because of the violence against your brother Jacob, you will be covered with shame;

you will be destroyed forever."

v. 15 "The day of the Lord is near for all nations. As you have done, it will be done to you; your deeds will return upon your own head."

v. 17 "But on Mount Zion will be deliverance; it will be holy, and Jacob will possess his inheritance."

# Obadiah v. 12-14

1. *"You should not gloat over your brother in the day of his misfortune."*
2. *"nor rejoice over the people of Judah in the day of their destruction"*
3. *"nor boast so much in the day of their trouble."*
4. *"You should not march through the gates of my people in the day of their disaster"*
5. *"nor gloat over them in their calamity in the day of their disaster"*
6. *"nor seize their wealth in the day of their disaster."*
7. *"You should not wait at the crossroads to cut down their fugitives"*
8. *"nor hand over their survivors in the day of their trouble."*

## Verse 15 → universal

Edom will be judged because the day of the Lord is coming upon all nations. A foretaste and an image that the whole world will be judged.

3. Retribution: Rewarded for one's own deeds

Edom represents all nations (as in Amos 9:12, Isa 34 and Isa 63) because:

1. Edom was the closest to Israel of all the nations.
2. Same consonants in Edom and Adam (mankind). This "pun" is evident in Amos 9:12 LXX quoted in Acts 15.

## What happened to Edom?

* Taken by Babylon in 553 BC
* The Nabateans took over their territory and pushed them into southern Judah, which was called Idumea in Greek (1 Macc 4:29).
* The Maccabees conquered Edom in 163 BC.
* Was forcibly converted to Judaism in 125 BC and became part of Judea.
* Later, the Edomites were included in the other ethnic groups and are no longer referred to as a separate ethnic group. However, the name of the area lived on for a while under its Greek name, Idumea.

# Verses 16-18

4. Retribution: The house of Jacob will drive out those who drove them out (v. 17).

There must be salvation, but not for a single Edomite.

* Historical: Incorporated into Judea in the 100s BC, there comes someone from Idumea to meet Jesus in Mark 3:8.
* Messianic: God's people will participate in God's complete judgment on the world (Matthew 19:28, 1 Cor 6:2), here represented by Edom.

All nations will perish, and only God's people will stand - but God's people will consist of all nations.

# Verses 19-20

Negev (“south”): The Judean desert, west of Edom.

The Lowlands: West, between Jerusalem and Philistia

Ephraim/Samaria: The former northern kingdom.

Gilead: East

Israel gained control of these areas in the 100s BC.

Israelites in exile after 722 BC and Judeans in exile after 586 BC will return and regain their territories. (Sefarad: probably Saparda in Media)

Meaning: All of Israel will be restored and expand its borders.

But are we to interpret it historically when the Northern Kingdom never returned, and e.g. Amos 9:11-12 is interpreted messianically in Acts 15? And hasn't the message become more universal from verse 15?

# Verse 21

*"Those who have been saved"* (NCB), *"deliverers"* (NASB), *"saviors"* (ESV, LXX).

God's delivered people who go up to the Lord's temple mountain (Is 2) and who delivers others?

Deliver and judge: Salvation and judgment as two sides of the same coin.

The ultimate goal: *"the kingdom will be the Lord’s" (v. 21b).* God's kingdom truly came when Jesus came, and these physical lands point to the fact that the whole earth will one day belong to God.

Rev 11:15: *"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever."*

# Obadiah, Jesus and us

Israel vs. Edom → “fulfilled” with Jesus vs. Herod.

Google: “History's worst traitors?” Judas

God's enemies, represented by Edom, never stop attacking and betraying His people. Obadiah reminds us that God sees it, he is in control, and he will judge it. He is on the throne, and the kingdom will belong to the Lord.

2 Thessalonians 1:6-8: *"For this is just in the eyes of God: When someone causes you tribulations, he will reciprocate with tribulations, and you who face tribulations, he will give relief together with us. This is how it will be when the Lord Jesus reveals himself from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire and punishes those who do not know God, and those who are not obedient to the gospel of our Lord Jesus."*

Jesus sees and cares about what is happening to us, his body, now (Acts 9:4-5).