

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

OBADIAH

THEME

Author and Title

The superscription for the book identifies the genre as a “vision,” a prophetic revelation from God spoken through his prophet “Obadiah.” Unfortunately, the only thing known about this prophet is his name (a common one in the OT), which means “one who serves Yahweh.” It is unlikely that he is the same Obadiah as the official over Ahab’s household in [1 Kings 18:3–16](#) (9th century B.C.), for the book seems to have been written after the fall of Jerusalem (586; see [Date](#)).

Date

Because the superscription gives no chronological information, readers can infer only the approximate time of the prophet from the book’s contents. Suggested dates range from very early (c. 850 B.C.) to very late (c. 400). Since the book presents the fall of Jerusalem as a past event ([v. 11](#)) and the fall of Edom as a future event, a probable date would be after 586 B.C. (the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon) and before 553 (Babylon’s campaign against Edom). Therefore, the most likely situation is the first half of the Babylonian exile. The place of writing is Jerusalem.

Theme

On the one hand, Edom, together with all other nations that oppose Israel’s God and his people, will experience God’s retributive judgment. On the other hand, God’s own covenant people, who have already experienced God’s judgment, will receive restoration from their God. The book ends with the promise of the kingdom of God.

Purpose, Occasion, and Background

Obadiah exhibits numerous parallels with other OT texts, especially Jeremiah’s Edom prophecy ([Jer. 49:7–22](#)). Essentially the message of Obadiah spells out what [Lamentations 4:22](#) announces: restoration for Zion but doom for Edom.

The Jerusalemites experienced God’s judgment ([Obad. 16a](#)) when enemies invaded and “cast lots for Jerusalem” ([v. 11](#)). The Edomites, the descendants of Jacob’s brother

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Esau and one of Israel's neighbors to the southeast, should have assisted their brothers during the Babylonian crisis. Instead they sided with the foreign invaders and even took advantage of Israel's misfortune (vv. 10–14).

Holy Zion had been profaned, and God's people were put to public shame. Edom felt secure in spite of its complicity in Israel's demise. For all intents and purposes it looked as though Edom and the foreign nations were in charge, ruling over the future of Israel. The book of Lamentations reveals the extent to which Israel was devastated by the exile—politically, economically, and theologically. Does Israel have a future? Will Zion be profaned forever? Will the plan for Abraham's offspring to bring blessing to the world come to nothing? Will Edom and the hostile nations triumph? Is God indifferent to all of this?

Into this bleak situation the prophet Obadiah proclaimed the word of Yahweh. The first half of Obadiah (vv. 1–15) addresses Edom with "you" singular. The prophet announces coming judgment against Edom and warns Edom to desist from its anti-Judahite hostilities before it is too late, before "the day of the LORD" comes against "all the nations" (v. 15). The standard of the judgment will be strict retributive justice (v. 15).

The second half (vv. 16–21) addresses the people of Jerusalem with "you" plural in verse 16: "you ... on my holy mountain." Here the prophet gives hope to God's beleaguered people with the good news of the future great reversal. On the terrible day of the Lord the hostile nations will receive God's judgment, but those in Zion will be saved, and Zion will be holy (vv. 16–17a). All Israel will be reunited and given the Promised Land and victory over Edom (vv. 17b–20). The last line expresses God's ultimate goal: to establish his kingly reign over all the earth (v. 21).

Key Themes

1. Enemies will be put to shame because of their enmity against God's people (v. 10).
2. Every proud human effort at self-security will ultimately fail before God's coming judgment (vv. 1–9).
3. God's retributive justice is strict and fair, with the punishment corresponding to the misdeeds (v. 15).
4. Reunited Israel will experience God's deliverance (vv. 16–17), possess the Promised Land, and defeat and rule over Edom (vv. 17–21).
5. In the future, Yahweh will definitively manifest his kingly rule (v. 21).

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History of Salvation Summary

Edom is the target of Obadiah's prophecy of doom because it exemplifies hostility toward God's people. The Edomites took delight in bringing disaster to Jerusalem. Even though Jerusalem fell for its unfaithfulness, and even though Edom was one of God's tools for bringing judgment, the Lord has tied himself to his people and will punish those who hurt them. Eventually, Jerusalem will be restored and its blessings will extend to the Gentiles (vv. 19–21). (For an explanation of the "History of Salvation," see the [Overview of the Bible](#). See also [History of Salvation in the Old Testament: Preparing the Way for Christ](#).)

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Literary Features

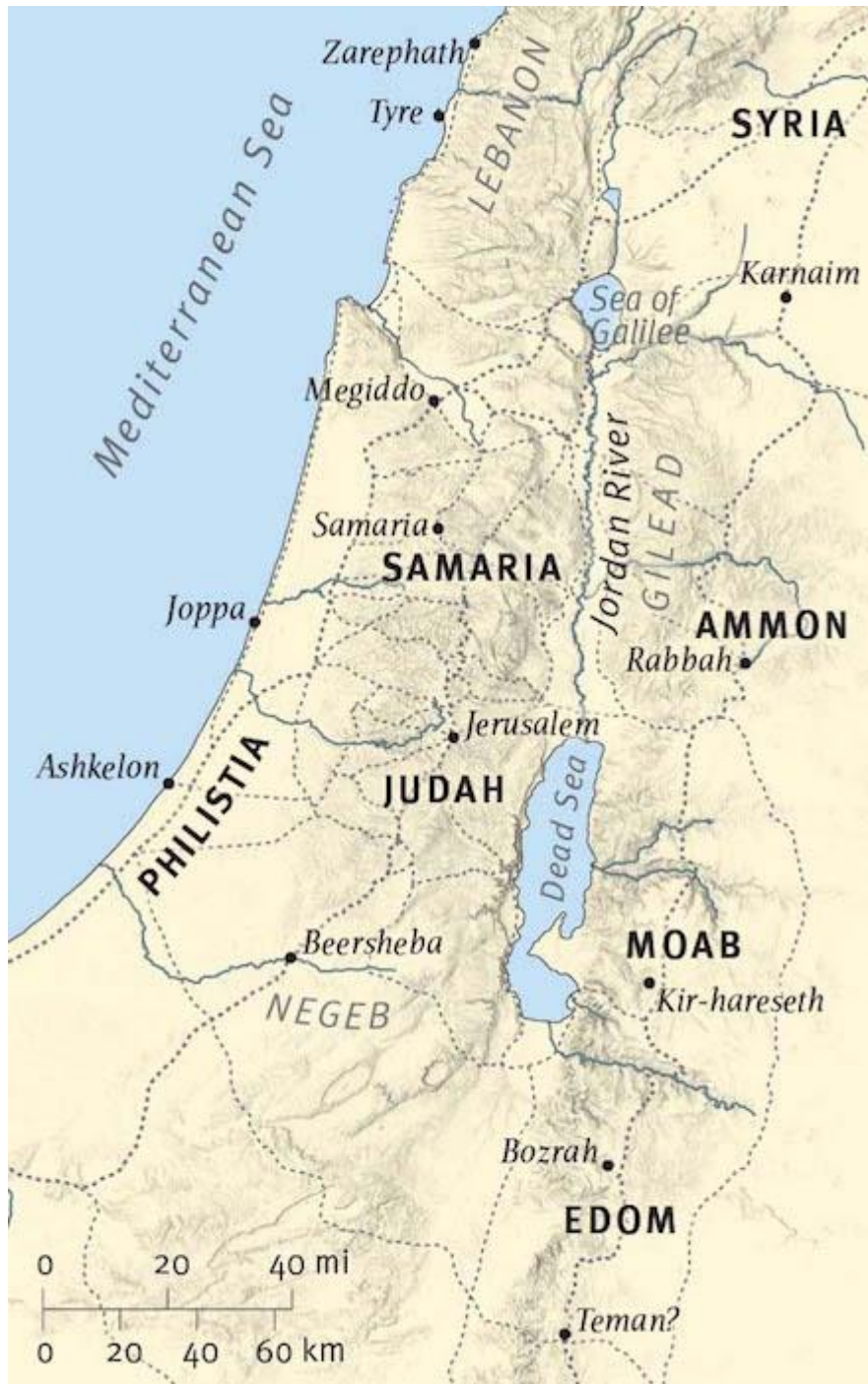
The primary genre is prophecy, and as is customary in prophecy, the predictions of the future are couched in oracles of judgment and an oracle of salvation or deliverance. The oracles of judgment against Edom are examples of satire, with discernible objects of attack and a satiric norm by which Edom and other nations are criticized.

The Setting of Obadiah

c. 570 B.C.

Though various dates have been given for the prophecy of Obadiah, it was most likely written sometime after the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians in 586 B.C. but prior to the fall of Edom in 553. Obadiah condemned the Edomites, who were descendants of Jacob's brother Esau, for attacking the Judeans during the Babylonian crisis rather than assisting them.

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Outline

- I. First Announcement of Judgment to Edom ([vv. 1–4](#))
- II. Second Announcement of Judgment to Edom ([vv. 5–7](#))
- III. Announcement of Judgment, Accusation, and Warning to Edom ([vv. 8–15](#))

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- IV. Promise of Restoration and Victory to Israel ([vv. 16–18](#))
- V. Promise of Restoration and Yahweh's Kingship ([vv. 19–21](#))¹

¹ Crossway Bibles. (2008). *The ESV Study Bible* (pp. 1677-1679). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.