

Obadiah

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Author: Obadiah · Written: c. 586-550 BC (or possibly earlier) · Category: Minor Prophets

Introduction

Obadiah is the shortest book in the Old Testament—just 21 verses—yet it delivers one of Scripture's most powerful messages about divine justice, national pride, and covenant loyalty. This brief prophetic oracle addresses Edom, the descendants of Esau, who inhabited the rugged mountainous region southeast of the Dead Sea. **The book exposes the ultimate consequences of pride and the inevitable judgment that falls on those who harm God's people**, particularly during their time of greatest vulnerability. Though small in size, Obadiah is vast in theological significance, addressing timeless themes of brotherhood betrayed, justice delayed but certain, and the final triumph of God's kingdom.

The occasion for Obadiah's prophecy was Edom's treacherous conduct during Jerusalem's darkest hour. When Babylon laid siege to Jerusalem in 586 BC, Edom not only stood by watching but actively participated in the violence and looting. They cut off fleeing refugees, handed survivors over to the enemy, and rejoiced over their brother Jacob's destruction. This betrayal was particularly heinous given that Edom and Israel shared the closest possible ethnic relationship—both nations descended from twin brothers, Esau and Jacob. **Edom's conduct transformed a family relationship into bitter enmity**, violating the most basic obligations of kinship and covenant. The prophet Ezekiel also denounced this treachery (Ezekiel 25:12-14; 35:1-15), and Psalm 137:7 captures Israel's bitter memory of Edom's gloating.

Obadiah's message operates on multiple levels. Historically, it addresses a specific act of betrayal and announces judgment on a particular nation. Theologically, it reveals principles of divine justice that transcend its immediate context—pride invites downfall, betrayal will be repaid, and those who align against God's purposes will not ultimately prevail. **The prophecy demonstrates that God is not indifferent to injustice but actively intervenes in history to vindicate the oppressed and humble the arrogant.** The complete fulfillment of Obadiah's predictions against Edom—a once-powerful nation that has left virtually no descendants and whose capital city Petra stands in ruins—validates the certainty of prophetic word.

The book's structure moves from particular to universal, from Edom's judgment to the Day of the LORD affecting all nations, and finally to the establishment of God's kingdom. This movement reminds readers that individual historical judgments foreshadow ultimate eschatological realities. **Edom becomes a case study in how God deals with proud nations**, a warning to all who exalt themselves and oppress others. Yet the book does not end with judgment but with hope—the kingdom shall be the LORD's, and saviors shall arise on Mount Zion. This promise points beyond

immediate vindication to the ultimate triumph of God's redemptive purposes through the Messiah.

Book Outline

- **Edom's Coming Destruction** (1:1-9) — Edom's pride and coming humiliation
- **Edom's Crimes** (1:10-14) — Violence against brother Jacob
- **The Day of the LORD** (1:15-21) — Universal judgment, Israel's restoration

Key Themes

- **The Destructiveness of Pride:** Edom's confidence in their impregnable mountain fortresses became the source of their downfall. **Pride deceives those who trust in their own security**, making them believe they are beyond reach of judgment. The rhetorical question 'Who will bring me down?' is answered definitively: the LORD will. This theme warns that no human achievement, natural advantage, or military strength can protect against divine judgment when pride has closed the heart to God.
- **Covenant Brotherhood Violated:** The repeated emphasis on 'your brother Jacob' underscores the heinous nature of Edom's betrayal. **Violence against a brother carries special guilt**—it violates not only justice but also kinship obligations. The ancient rivalry between Jacob and Esau, seemingly resolved in Genesis 33, erupted in later generations into bitter national enmity. Obadiah teaches that family relationships carry responsibilities, and their violation brings severe consequences.
- **The Principle of Retributive Justice:** The book's central principle is stated clearly: '**As you have done, it will be done to you; your deeds will return upon your own head**' (v. 15). This is the *lex talionis* (law of retaliation) applied to nations—measure for measure, Edom will experience what they inflicted. They rejoiced at their brother's downfall; they will be brought down. They cut off refugees; they will have no survivors. Divine justice is exact and inescapable.
- **God's Protection of His People:** Though Israel suffered at Edom's hands, **God acts as their defender**, bringing judgment on those who harm them. This theme echoes the Abrahamic covenant promise: 'I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse' (Genesis 12:3). The principle extends throughout Scripture—touching God's anointed brings divine response. God may use enemies to discipline His people, but He also judges those enemies for their cruelty.
- **The Day of the LORD:** Obadiah's particular judgment on Edom expands into **the universal Day of the LORD near upon all nations** (v. 15). This 'day' represents God's decisive intervention in history to judge wickedness and establish righteousness. What Edom experienced in microcosm, all nations will experience in fullness. The Day of the LORD becomes a dominant theme in prophetic literature, pointing ultimately to Christ's return and final judgment.
- **The Reversal of Fortunes:** Those who were high will be brought low; those who were dispossessed will possess. **Mount Esau will be judged by saviors from Mount Zion**; those who plundered will be plundered. Israel, who lost their land, will expand their borders. This theme of reversal demonstrates that God's justice

ultimately prevails over human injustice, and that the meek truly will inherit the earth.

- **The Triumph of God's Kingdom:** The book's climactic declaration—'**the kingdom shall be the LORD's**'—asserts God's ultimate sovereignty over all earthly powers. Edom, Israel, and all nations exist under divine rule. This kingdom is not merely future but is the underlying reality of history. God's kingdom purposes will prevail despite temporary setbacks, and all rival claims to sovereignty will ultimately bow before the King of kings.
- **False Security in Natural Advantages:** Edom trusted in their mountain fortresses, their inaccessible heights, their strategic location. **Natural advantages cannot substitute for right relationship with God.** The very places that seemed to guarantee security became traps—their allies turned against them, their hiding places were plundered, their 'nest among the stars' was brought down. This warns against trusting in anything other than God Himself.

Key Verses

The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee, thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high; that saith in his heart, Who shall bring me down to the ground? Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down, saith the LORD.

— Obadiah 1:3-4 (This passage exposes **pride as fundamentally deceptive**—it blinds people to their vulnerability before God. Edom's mountain fortresses, carved into sheer rock cliffs at Petra, seemed impregnable. Yet natural advantages provide no protection against divine judgment. The escalating imagery—from rock clefts to eagle's nest to stars—demonstrates that no height is beyond God's reach. Pride makes the arrogant ask 'Who can bring me down?' when they should ask 'How can I remain right with God?')

For thy violence against thy brother Jacob shame shall cover thee, and thou shalt be cut off for ever.

— Obadiah 1:10 (The charge is not merely violence but **violence against a brother**, making Edom's sin both cruel and treacherous. The term 'brother' appears five times in verses 10-12, emphasizing the relationship Edom violated. Shame—not glory—will be Edom's portion, and their cutting off will be permanent. This verse establishes the principle that family obligations matter to God, and their violation brings severe judgment. The permanence of Edom's destruction validates the prophecy—no identifiable Edomite people exist today.)

For the day of the LORD is near upon all the heathen: as thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee: thy reward shall return upon thine own head.

— Obadiah 1:15 (This verse moves from **Edom's particular judgment to universal eschatological judgment**. The Day of the LORD, a dominant prophetic theme, represents God's decisive intervention to judge wickedness and vindicate righteousness. The principle 'as you have done, it will be done to you' expresses perfect retributive justice—deeds return upon the doer's head. This warns all nations that their treatment of others, especially God's people, will determine their own fate. What we sow, we reap.)

And saviours shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be the LORD's.

— Obadiah 1:21 (The book's climax declares **God's ultimate sovereign rule over all earthly powers**. 'Saviors' (or deliverers) from Zion will execute judgment on Edom's mountain stronghold, reversing the power dynamics. The plural 'saviors' may refer to judges like those in Israel's early history, but points ultimately to the Savior who will establish God's kingdom forever. The final declaration—'the kingdom shall be the LORD's'—affirms that despite all opposition, God's sovereign reign is history's destination and underlying reality.)

But thou shouldest not have looked on the day of thy brother in the day that he became a stranger; neither shouldest thou have rejoiced over the children of Judah in the day of their destruction; neither shouldest thou have spoken proudly in the day of distress.

— Obadiah 1:12 (The eightfold repetition of **'you should not have' in verses 12-14 catalogs Edom's sins** during Jerusalem's fall: gloating, rejoicing, boasting, entering the city, looting, cutting off refugees, and handing over survivors. This detailed indictment shows that passive observation of evil (looking on) and active participation (looting, betraying) are both condemned. Taking pleasure in another's misfortune, especially a brother's, violates fundamental covenant love and invites God's displeasure.)

But upon mount Zion shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness; and the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions.

— Obadiah 1:17 (While Edom faces destruction, **Zion receives deliverance and holiness**. The contrast is deliberate—Mount Esau judged, Mount Zion delivered. The promise that Jacob will 'possess their possessions' means recovering what was lost and inheriting what God promised. This principle of restoration appears throughout Scripture—God's people, though temporarily dispossessed, will ultimately receive their inheritance. The holiness of Zion points to the purified community dwelling in God's presence.)

And the house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau for stubble, and they shall kindle in them, and devour them; and there shall not be any remaining of the house of Esau; for the LORD hath spoken it.

— Obadiah 1:18 (Using the imagery of **fire consuming stubble**, this verse promises Edom's complete destruction. Jacob and Joseph (representing all Israel) will be instruments of divine judgment. The emphasis 'there shall not be any remaining' indicates total destruction—a prophecy fulfilled in history as Edomite identity disappeared. The validation formula 'for the LORD has spoken it' grounds the certainty of fulfillment in God's unchanging word. What God declares will certainly come to pass.)

Historical Context

Edom occupied the mountainous region southeast of the Dead Sea, with their capital Petra carved into rock cliffs. The Edomites descended from Esau, Jacob's twin brother, making them Israel's closest relatives. Despite this kinship, Edom consistently opposed Israel throughout history. Their worst betrayal came in 586 BC, when they assisted Babylon and gloated over Jerusalem's destruction (see Psalm 137:7).

Literary Style

Despite its brevity, Obadiah is artistically crafted. The book moves from Edom's arrogance (dwelling in rocky heights) to their humiliation (brought down). Vivid imagery depicts Edom's allies turning against them and their complete plunder. The ironic reversals are striking—Edom who stood at crossroads to cut off escapees will themselves have no survivors. The book ends with the grand vision of God's kingdom.

Theological Significance

Obadiah makes crucial contributions to biblical theology despite its brevity. The book demonstrates that **God's justice operates with precision in history**, holding nations accountable for their actions toward others, particularly toward His covenant people. This principle, rooted in the Abrahamic covenant promise to bless those who bless Abraham and curse those who curse him (Genesis 12:3), extends throughout biblical history. Nations are not autonomous actors free from divine oversight but exist under God's moral governance.

The **concept of retributive justice**—'as you have done, it will be done to you'—reveals that divine justice is neither arbitrary nor vindictive but precisely calibrated to the offense. This principle appears throughout Scripture (Matthew 7:2; Galatians 6:7; Revelation 18:6) and undergirds confidence that injustice will not ultimately prevail. Oppressors will experience what they inflicted; the arrogant will be humbled by the measure they used against others. This retributive principle both warns the wicked and comforts the oppressed.

Obadiah's treatment of **pride as the root sin** that leads to destruction contributes to Scripture's consistent condemnation of this vice. Pride is fundamentally deceptive—it blinds people to their true condition and vulnerability before God. The proud trust in their own strength, achievements, or advantages rather than in God. This theme connects to Proverbs 16:18 ('Pride goes before destruction'), James 4:6 ('God opposes the proud'), and 1 Peter 5:5. Pride positions the self as autonomous, which is the essence of rebellion against God.

The book also develops the **eschatological theme of the Day of the LORD**. What begins as judgment on Edom expands to universal judgment on all nations (v. 15), demonstrating that particular historical judgments prefigure the ultimate judgment. The Day of the LORD is both imminent ('near') and universal ('upon all nations'), both temporal (historical judgments) and eschatological (final judgment). This theme, developed extensively by later prophets and the New Testament, establishes that history moves toward divine reckoning.

Finally, Obadiah's **vision of God's kingdom as history's goal** ('the kingdom shall be the LORD's') affirms divine sovereignty over all competing powers. Human kingdoms rise and fall, but God's kingdom is eternal. This kingdom is not merely future but is the underlying reality—God reigns even when His rule is contested. The establishment of visible divine rule over all the earth becomes a dominant biblical theme, finding fulfillment in Christ's kingdom that grows from small beginnings to fill the earth.

Christ in Obadiah

Obadiah points to Christ in several significant ways. The **'saviors' (deliverers) who come up on Mount Zion to judge Mount Esau** (v. 21) find their ultimate fulfillment in Christ, the Savior who executes judgment and establishes God's kingdom. The plural form may initially refer to various judges and deliverers in Israel's history, but points prophetically to the one great Deliverer who will judge all nations. Christ is the Savior from Zion who brings both salvation to His people and judgment on His enemies.

The climactic declaration that **'the kingdom shall be the LORD's'** (v. 21) is fulfilled in Christ's kingdom. Jesus proclaimed 'the kingdom of God is at hand' (Mark 1:15) and taught His disciples to pray 'Your kingdom come' (Matthew 6:10). Through His death, resurrection, and ascension, Christ has inaugurated God's kingdom, which will be consummated at His return. The kingdom belongs ultimately to the LORD, and Christ shares in that divine sovereignty as the Son of God incarnate.

The principle that **nations are judged based on how they treat God's people** extends into the New Testament, where Christ identifies Himself with His followers: 'As you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me' (Matthew 25:40). The parable of the sheep and goats shows nations being judged for how they treated Christ's people during their distress—precisely the issue in Obadiah. Those who harm Christ's church harm Christ Himself.

Edom's pride brought low foreshadows Christ's teaching that 'everyone who exalts himself will be humbled' (Luke 14:11; 18:14). Throughout His ministry, Jesus confronted the proud and welcomed the humble. The reversal of fortunes—the high brought low, the low lifted up—characterizes the kingdom Christ inaugurated. Mary's Magnificat celebrates this: 'He has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate' (Luke 1:52).

The **retributive principle** 'as you have done, it will be done to you' appears in Jesus' teaching: 'With the measure you use, it will be measured to you' (Matthew 7:2). Yet Christ also transcends simple retribution by absorbing the judgment sinners deserved. The cross is where retributive justice and mercy meet—Christ receives what we deserved (judgment) so we can receive what He deserved (blessing). Obadiah's principle of justice is fulfilled and transcended in the gospel.

Relationship to the New Testament

The New Testament engages Obadiah's themes at several points, though direct quotations are absent. The **principle of retributive justice** ('as you have done, it will be done to you,' v. 15) appears in Jesus' teaching about judgment: 'For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you' (Matthew 7:2). This same principle underlies Paul's teaching: 'Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap' (Galatians 6:7). The law of sowing and reaping governs both individual lives and national destinies.

Edom becomes a type of those who oppose God's purposes in later Scripture. Herod the Great, who sought to kill the infant Jesus, was an Idumean (Edomite). This historical irony—a descendant of Esau trying to destroy the descendant of Jacob who is the Messiah—embodies the ongoing spiritual warfare between those aligned with God's kingdom and those opposed to it. The Herodians who opposed Jesus throughout His ministry represented this Edomite hostility.

The **Day of the LORD theme** in Obadiah contributes to New Testament eschatology. Peter warns that 'the day of the Lord will come like a thief' (2 Peter 3:10), and Paul describes it as the day when 'the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God' (2 Thessalonians 1:7-8). What Obadiah described in terms of Edom's judgment, the New Testament expands to final universal judgment.

The kingdom belonging to the LORD (v. 21) finds extensive development in the New Testament's kingdom theology. Jesus' proclamation that 'the kingdom of God is at hand' (Mark 1:15) announces the arrival of the divine rule Obadiah foresaw. Paul declares that at the end, when Christ delivers the kingdom to the Father, 'God may be all in all' (1 Corinthians 15:28). Revelation's climax proclaims: 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ' (Revelation 11:15)—the very truth Obadiah announced.

The reversal of fortunes—the high brought low, the dispossessed repossessed—is central to New Testament teaching. The Magnificat celebrates this: 'He has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate' (Luke 1:52). Jesus' Beatitudes promise that 'the meek shall inherit the earth' (Matthew 5:5). James warns the rich who oppress: 'Your riches have rotted... You have laid up treasure in the last days' (James 5:1-3). The pattern Obadiah describes operates throughout redemptive history.

Pride's downfall, so vividly portrayed in Edom's judgment, is consistently taught in the New Testament. 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble' (James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5). Jesus warned that 'everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted' (Luke 14:11). The church at Laodicea, proud of their wealth and self-sufficiency, was actually 'wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked' (Revelation 3:17)—deceived by pride just as Edom was.

Practical Application

Obadiah's message remains powerfully relevant for contemporary believers in multiple areas of life and faith. First, the book **warns against pride in all its forms**—pride in achievements, natural advantages, security, or position. Edom's confidence in their impregnable mountain fortresses mirrors modern trust in wealth, technology, military might, or social status. The rhetorical question 'Who can bring me down?' expresses the arrogance that assumes invulnerability. Obadiah reminds us that no human achievement provides security apart from right relationship with God. Pride deceives, making us blind to our true vulnerability.

The principle of retributive justice ('as you have done, it will be done to you') should inform how we treat others. Our actions toward others, particularly the vulnerable and those in distress, will return upon our own heads. This warns against exploitation, rejoicing in others' misfortune, or betraying those who trust us. It encourages compassion, justice, and integrity, knowing that we will reap what we sow. The measure we use for others will be used for us.

Obadiah exposes the particular sin of **taking pleasure in others' misfortune**, especially when they are family, brothers in faith, or people with whom we share heritage. The repeated 'you should not have' in verses 12-14 condemns both passive gloating and active participation in harm. This challenges us to examine our hearts when others suffer—do we grieve with them, or do we secretly feel superior or satisfied? Schadenfreude (joy in others' pain) is condemned as incompatible with covenant love.

The book **encourages those suffering injustice** that God sees and will act. While justice may seem delayed, it is not denied. God is not indifferent to the oppression of His people. Those who harm God's children will answer to Him. This provides comfort to the persecuted and exploited—their cause is God's cause, and He will vindicate them in His time. The complete fulfillment of Obadiah's prophecy against Edom validates confidence in God's promises.

The danger of false security in natural advantages or human strength is exposed. Edom trusted in geography, fortifications, allies, and wisdom—all failed them. We face similar temptations: trusting in financial reserves, insurance policies, relationships, education, or health. While these have proper place, they cannot substitute for trust in God. When we make them our ultimate security, they become idols that will fail us. True security is found only in the LORD.

The climactic truth—**'the kingdom shall be the LORD's'**—provides hope amid chaotic circumstances. Human kingdoms rise and fall; political powers come and go;

earthly securities fail. But God's kingdom is eternal and will ultimately triumph. This grounds Christian hope not in changing circumstances but in unchanging divine purposes. No matter how bleak things appear, God's kingdom purposes will prevail. This calls us to align our lives with that kingdom rather than with passing earthly powers.

Finally, Obadiah calls us to **self-examination regarding pride**. Do we trust in our own strength, achievements, or advantages? Do we ask 'Who can bring me down?' rather than 'How can I walk humbly with my God?' The book invites us to identify areas where pride has deceived us into false confidence, and to repent, recognizing that apart from God's grace we have nothing secure. Humility before God is the path to true security and blessing.

Chapter 1

The Doom of Edom

1 The vision of Obadiah. Thus saith the Lord GOD concerning Edom; We have heard a rumour from the LORD, and an ambassador is sent among the heathen, Arise ye, and let us rise up against her in battle.

2 Behold, I have made thee small among the heathen: thou art greatly despised.

3 The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee, thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high; that saith in his heart, Who shall bring me down to the ground?

4 Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down, saith the LORD.

5 If thieves came to thee, if robbers by night, (how art thou cut off!) would they not have stolen till they had enough? if the grapegatherers came to thee, would they not leave some grapes?

6 How are the things of Esau searched out! how are his hidden things sought up!

7 All the men of thy confederacy have brought thee even to the border: the men that were at peace with thee have deceived thee, and prevailed against thee; they that eat thy bread have laid a wound under thee: there is none understanding in him.

8 Shall I not in that day, saith the LORD, even destroy the wise men out of Edom, and understanding out of the mount of Esau?

9 And thy mighty men, O Teman, shall be dismayed, to the end that every one of the mount of Esau may be cut off by slaughter.

10 For thy violence against thy brother Jacob shame shall cover thee, and thou shalt be cut off for ever.

11 In the day that thou stoodest on the other side, in the day that the strangers carried away captive his forces, and foreigners entered into his gates, and cast lots upon Jerusalem, even thou wast as one of them.

12 But thou shouldest not have looked on the day of thy brother in the day that he became a stranger; neither shouldest thou have rejoiced over the children of Judah in the day of their destruction; neither shouldest thou have spoken proudly in the day of distress.

13 Thou shouldest not have entered into the gate of my people in the day of their calamity; yea, thou shouldest not have looked on their affliction in the day of their calamity, nor have laid hands on their substance in the day of their calamity;

14 Neither shouldest thou have stood in the crossway, to cut off those of his that did escape; neither shouldest thou have delivered up those of his that did remain in the day of distress.

The Day of the Lord

15 For the day of the LORD is near upon all the heathen: as thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee: thy reward shall return upon thine own head.

16 For as ye have drunk upon my holy mountain, so shall all the heathen drink continually, yea, they shall drink, and they shall swallow down, and they shall be as though they had not been.

17 But upon mount Zion shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness; and the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions.

18 And the house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau for stubble, and they shall kindle in them, and devour them; and there shall not be any remaining of the house of Esau; for the LORD hath spoken it.

19 And they of the south shall possess the mount of Esau; and they of the plain the Philistines: and they shall possess the fields of Ephraim, and the fields of Samaria: and Benjamin shall possess Gilead.

20 And the captivity of this host of the children of Israel shall possess that of the Canaanites, even unto Zarephath; and the captivity of Jerusalem, which is in Sepharad, shall possess the cities of the south.

21 And saviours shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be the LORD'S.