

THE BOOK OF OBADIAH

A. ORIENTING DATA FOR OBADIAH

- Content: a doom oracle against Edom for taking advantage of (probably) the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem in 588–86 B.C.
- Prophet: Obadiah, a prophet from Judah
- Date of prophetic activity: probably just after the fall of Jerusalem (586 B.C.?)
- Emphases: God’s judgment on Edom for her sins against God’s people; the defeat of those who think themselves unconquerable; Israel’s deliverance and restoration on the day of the Lord

B. OVERVIEW OF OBADIAH

This fourth of the Book of the Twelve, which is also the shortest book in the Old Testament, is a single, unified prophecy against Edom that was probably spoken to various groups of Judeans to encourage them in the aftermath of their national tragedy. All the parts of a doom oracle are present: the announcement of doom—a prediction of Edom’s coming defeat (vv. 1–9); the reasons for doom—a review of Edom’s crimes against his “brother” while Judah was helpless (vv. 10–14); and the promised future (for Jacob, not Esau!)—on the day of the Lord Israel’s sovereignty will be restored (vv. 15–21).

C. SPECIFIC ADVICE FOR READING OBADIAH

Edom was Israel’s most tenacious foe throughout the history of the two “brother” nations (v. 10; cf. Gen 25:24–34), so it should come as no surprise that Edom is the subject of more foreign-nation oracles than any other people (Isa 21:11–12; 34:5–15; Jer 49:7–22; Ezek 25:12–14; 35:1–15; Amos 1:11–12; cf. Joel 3:19; Mal 1:2–5).

The principles for reading any foreign-nation oracle apply here. Yahweh is God not only of Israel but also of all the nations of the world; it reflects the “curse” side of the Abrahamic covenant (“I will curse those who curse you”); it is the prophet’s engagement in the holy war, as a messenger of the Divine Warrior. If Israel’s sins are great and deserve punishment, the treachery of Edom will also be punished, since it stands so completely over against God’s own character of generosity and kindness. Moreover, if God is to deliver his people completely and permanently, he cannot leave their enemies free to strike again. Here again you find the typical final eschatological backdrop against which temporal judgments are to be understood (see *How to 1*, p. 201).

You may want to read Psalm 137 alongside this oracle to capture the sense of how deeply Israel felt about Edom’s treachery. You may also want to read Obadiah 1–6 alongside Jeremiah 49:14–16 (for vv. 1–4) and 49:9–10 (for vv. 5–6); very likely Obadiah is restating and recasting Jeremiah’s oracle as his starting point, an oracle that is probably well known to his hearers.¹

¹ Gordon D. Fee and Douglas K. Stuart, [*How to Read the Bible Book by Book: A Guided Tour*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 228–229.