

## 'Ovadyah ~ Part 1

### Introduction

Many **Prophetic Books** contain prophecies against several nations, but the book of **'Ovadyah** focuses exclusively on the nation of **Edom**. **'Ovadyah's** short message centers on the approaching **Day of the Lord** and the promise that **Isra'el** will possess the land of **Edom**. Presumably, **'Ovadyah** (v. 1) was the author of this book, but nothing else is known about him. His common Hebrew name, denoting "*servant of God*," is shared by at least a dozen persons in the **Tanakh**.

The date of **'Ovadyah's** writing is disputed, with a wide range of proposed dates from the tenth to the fifth centuries **B.C.**, depending on when the invasion and plunder of **Yerushalayim** (vv. 11–14) occurred. The two most popular views are during the reign of **King Jehoram of Judah** (ca. 848–841 **B.C.**) and shortly after the final destruction of **Yerushalayim** by the **Babylonians** (587/586 **B.C.**).

The former date (ca 845 **B.C.**) was when the **Philistines** and **Arabs** plundered **Judah** (2 Chronicles 21:16–17), and the **Edomites** revolted (2 Kings 8:20), presumably then becoming allies of the invaders. Since the text does not explicitly indicate the cooperation of the **Edomites** with the **Philistines** and **Arabs**, the latter date (mid-sixth or even fifth century **B.C.**) fits the biblical data better, including **Obidiah 20** (the dispersed exiles of the **Isra'elites** and of **Yerushalayim** to be restored), as opposed to dates before the dispersion of **Isra'el** (by 722 **B.C.**) or of **Y'hudah** (605–586 **B.C.**). This postexilic view is also supported by the mention of **Edomite** involvement in **Yerushalayim's** downfall (**Obidiah** 10–14, gloating over the fall of **Yerushalayim**, as in other sixth-century **B.C.** texts - **Lamentations** 4:21a; **Ezekiel** 35:15; cp. **Lamentations** 2:15–17 - and participating in the plunder) which would result in the **Lord's** promised justice *For the Day of Adonai is near for all nations; as you did, it will be done to you; your dealings will come back on your own head.* **'Ovadyah** 15).

**Judgment on Edom's arrogant presumption:** **God's** judgment was predicted for **Edom** because of her arrogance in trusting geographical security (vv. 3–5), diplomatic treaties (v. 7), and the counsel of her famed wise men (v. 8; Jer 49:7) instead of the true **God** of **Isra'el**. **Edom** was doubly deceived, depending on their own human understanding (Ob 3, 8) and believing in the loyalty of their human allies (v. 7). Thus, **God** would bring them down from the lofty cliffs and caves of their mountains. He would cover the **Edomites** with shame because of their arrogant gloating and gleeful participation in the downfall of their brother **Ya'akov**, the nation of **Yehuda** (vv. 10–14). <sup>1</sup>

### Preface

<sup>1</sup> *This is the vision of 'Ovadyah. Here is what Adonai Elohim says about Edom. As a messenger was being sent among the nations saying, "Come on, let's attack her," we heard a message from Adonai:*

*Here is what Adonai Elohim says* was a formulaic expression among the prophets, indicating that the prophet reports **God's** own speech. The prophet, as the called and sent messenger of the **Adonai Elohim**, introduces the divine speech that begins in v. 2. But first, **Ovadyah** provides background information. **God** is now recruiting the nations to revolt against **Edom** (e.g., Isaiah 13:2–5).

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<sup>1</sup> Gregory W. Parsons, "**Obadiah**," in *Holman Illustrated Bible Commentary*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen and Jeremy Royal Howard (Broadman & Holman, 2015), 941.

## Pride Rebuked

*<sup>2</sup> "I am making you the least of all nations, you will be beneath contempt. <sup>3</sup> Your proud heart has deceived you, you whose homes are caves in the cliffs, who live on the heights and say to yourselves, 'Who can bring me down to the ground?' <sup>4</sup> If you make your nest as high as an eagle's, even if you place it among the stars, I will bring you down from there." says Adonai.*

**God**, through his prophet, begins to address **Edom**. Prophetic discourse typically personifies a nation as a collective unity. **Edom** is insignificant among nations and, in fact, is despised. Just as **Edom** gloated over **Y'hudah** (vv. 12–13), so other nations hold it in contempt; this is said in contrast to **Edom's** own pride. The **Edomites** dwell in the mountainous region east of the Arabah (see map), with elevations up to 5,000 feet (1.5 km) above sea level. Their inaccessible location has given them false hopes of invulnerability. Usually, a rhetorical question expects no answer, but **God** answers it: ***Who can bring me down to the ground?... I will bring you down*** (vv. 3–4). **God** opposes the proud and arrogant (cf. Proverbs 15:25; James 4:6). ***Even if you place it among the stars***, it is hyperbole even for eagles.

## Vulnerability Exposed

*<sup>5</sup> If thieves were to come to you, or if robbers by night (Oh, how destroyed you are!), wouldn't they stop when they'd stolen enough? If grape-pickers came to you, wouldn't they leave some grapes for gleanings? <sup>6</sup> But see how 'Esav has been looted, their secret treasures searched out! <sup>7</sup> Your allies went with you only to the border; those at peace with you deceived and defeated you, those who ate your food set a trap for you, and you couldn't discern it.*<sup>2</sup>

Typically, by God's command, thieves and grape gatherers leave something behind. In contrast, **Edom** will be thoroughly plundered with nothing remaining. Just as **Edom** acted as a thief (v. 13), so its own hidden treasures will be ransacked. **'Esav** is used as a substitute name for **Edom** and evokes the **Ya'akov-'Esav** narratives (Deuteronomy 2:5; Jeremiah 49:8–10; Malachi 1:3–4). According to Genesis 36, **'Esav** was the father of the **Edomites**. The past-tense verbs speak about a future event as though it were already completed (see note on vv. 5–6). Just as **Edom** betrayed its own brother Jacob (vv. 10, 12), so **Edom's** own allies will turn against it. In the most likely historical setting, this would refer to the **Babylonians** (v. 11). In 553 B.C. **Babylon** campaigned against **Edom**. During the subsequent **Persian** period, **Edom's** land was settled by the **Nabateans**.

In Obadiah 1-7, **God's** judgment against **Edom** for its pride provides a timely reminder of the dangers of arrogance in everyday life. If you find yourself struggling with feeling superior or dismissive towards others - perhaps due to your achievements - take a moment to reflect on how pride can lead to isolation and destruction. Commit to practicing humility this week by intentionally valuing and uplifting someone who feels overlooked in your family or social circle. This could involve reaching out to a friend or family member and genuinely asking how they are doing, listening without judgment.

In our next post, we will continue to learn more about the **Prophecy of 'Ovadyah**.

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<sup>2</sup> Obadiah 1–7.