

## THE SETTING OF OBADIAH: WHEN DOES THE ORACLE CONCERNING EDOM TRANSPIRE?

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**Abstract:** *The setting of Obadiah persists as the book’s chief interpretive crux. When do the circumstances of Obadiah’s vision regarding Edom unfold? Three leading proposals emerge. The events of Obadiah play out (1) in the ninth century, during the reign of Jehoram; (2) in the sixth century, near the sack of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians; or (3) in a distant eschatological era, when Edom, Israel, and the nations meet their fate. Pertinent parallel passages concerning Edom include Jeremiah 49, Joel 3, Amos 9, and Ezekiel 35. This article weighs the interpretive options and argues for the best solution.*

**Key Words:** *Obadiah, Edom, Jeremiah 49, Joel 3, Amos 9, Ezekiel 35.*

Obadiah records a vision concerning the doom of Edom and the triumph of Israel. The story of Edom originates in the ancestral narratives of Genesis 25 and 27. While pregnant with twins, Rebekah receives a message from Yahweh: “Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples will be separated from your body. And one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger” (25:23). The twins, Jacob and Esau, eventually become the patriarchs of two nations, Israel and Edom. Edom plays a role in numerous OT prophecies. The timing of the fulfillment of the Edom prophecies sparks debate, and Obadiah is no exception. The setting of Obadiah remains the primary interpretive issue in the book. When do the events of Obadiah’s prophecy come to fruition? This study evaluates three leading options in order to reach a reasonable conclusion.

### I. NINTH-CENTURY SETTING

One option for the setting of Obadiah entails Edom’s revolt against Judah in the ninth century (2 Kgs 8:20–22; 2 Chr 21:8–20). During the reign of Jehoram (c. 852–841 BC) the Edomites declared their independence from Judah and crowned for themselves a king. So Jehoram traveled to Zair by night and slew some of his own Edomite kin. For this and other infractions Yahweh punished Jehoram and Judah with physical ailments and oppressors. The oppressors, namely the Philistines and Arabians, raided Judah, looted the king’s palace, and captured his family. Two years later Jehoram died of a severe bowel ailment.

Proponents of the ninth-century setting advance two lines of reasoning in support of this date. First, the canonical position of Obadiah seems to imply an early date. Obadiah sits as the fourth of twelve Minor Prophets. The book’s some-

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what early placement among the Twelve intimates a preexilic setting for interpreters who observe a roughly chronological progression among the Minor Prophets. But most adherents, including Niehaus, advance this kind of argumentation with caution.<sup>1</sup>

Second, some of the other prophets appear to depend upon Obadiah for their material, implying an early date for Obadiah. For instance, Jeremiah's prophecy concerning Edom in 49:7–22 relies upon Obadiah, according to Keil and Delitzsch.<sup>2</sup> The extensive overlap between the two prophecies appears in the Table ("Comparison of Obadiah and Jeremiah 49"). The possibility exists that Jeremiah borrowed from Obadiah, but even if Obadiah wrote in the ninth century, that still does not guarantee a ninth-century fulfillment. The date of composition could differ from the date of fulfillment by multiple centuries.

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<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey J. Niehaus, "Obadiah," in *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary*, vol. 2: *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, and Habakkuk* (ed. Thomas Edward McComiskey; Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 500.

<sup>2</sup> C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the OT*, vol. 10: *Minor Prophets* (trans. James Martin; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 229.

## Comparison of Obadiah and Jeremiah 49

Obadiah	Jeremiah 49
Thus says the Sovereign Yahweh concerning Edom (v. 1).	Concerning Edom, thus says Yahweh of Armies (v. 7).
<p>We will hear a report from Yahweh, And a messenger will be sent to the nations: “Arise and let us go against her for battle.” “I will make you small among the nations. You will be exceedingly despised.</p> <p>Your arrogant heart will deceive you, <i>You</i> who live in the clefts of the rock, On the height of your dwelling place, Thinking, ‘Who will bring me down to earth?’ “Though you will build high like the eagle, And though you situate your nest among the stars, From there I will bring you down,” declares Yahweh (vv. 1–4).</p>	<p>I will hear a message from Yahweh, And a messenger will be sent to the nations: “Gather yourselves, come against her, and arise for battle.” “Indeed, I will make you small among the nations, Despised by mankind. As for the terror of you, Your arrogant heart will deceive you, <i>You</i> who live in the clefts of the rock, <i>You</i> who seized the height of the hill.</p> <p>Though you will build your nest high like the eagle, From there I will bring you down,” declares Yahweh (vv. 14–16).</p>
<p>“If thieves came to you, If burglars by night, O how you would be destroyed. Would they not steal <i>only</i> until they had enough? If grape harvesters came to you, Would they not leave gleanings? O how Esau will be looted (חפץ), His hidden treasures will be sought” (vv. 5–6).</p>	<p>“If grape harvesters came to you, Would they not leave gleanings? If thieves <i>encroached</i> by night, They would destroy <i>only</i> until they had enough.</p> <p>I will strip (חשף) Esau bare, I will uncover his secret places” (vv. 9–10).</p>
<p>You will be unaware of it. Will I not ... destroy wise men from Edom, And understanding from the hill country of Esau? (vv. 7–8).</p>	<p>“Is there no more wisdom in Teman? Will counsel perish from the prudent? Will their wisdom vanish?” (v. 7).</p>
<p>“Indeed, just as you will drink on my holy hill, All the nations will drink continually. They will drink, gulp down, And become as if they had never existed” (v. 16).</p>	<p>“Those who were not sentenced to drink from the cup will certainly drink, and are you the one who will be completely acquitted? You will not be acquitted, but you will certainly drink” (v. 12).</p>

Two weaknesses encumber the ninth-century option. First, little historical evidence exists for a ninth-century fulfillment. For instance, the Edomites enter Judah

according to Obad 11–14, but the historical accounts never mention such an entrance.<sup>3</sup> In addition, as Rooker observes, “there is no indication that Judah underwent the kind of heart-wrenching pain indicated in Obadiah 10–14.”<sup>4</sup> Stuart agrees that “a ninth-century date is difficult to sustain because of the paucity of information about the supposed occasion.”<sup>5</sup> Second, a ninth-century fulfillment of Obadiah would mean that the seventh-century prophet Jeremiah produced a “prophecy after the event” (*vaticinium ex eventu*), given that both prophets describe the same situation. Indeed, the extensive overlap suggests that both prophets depict the same downfall of Edom. In light of these drawbacks, a second potential setting deserves our consideration.

## II. SIXTH-CENTURY SETTING

Another possible setting for Obadiah arises in the early exilic period, soon after the Babylonians ruined Jerusalem in the sixth century (2 Kgs 25:1–22; 2 Chr 36:17–21). At this time Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem for two and a half years, causing a famine in the city. When his army finally penetrated the wall in 586 BC, Zedekiah and his soldiers fled for their lives. The Chaldeans overtook them near Jericho, killed Zedekiah’s sons, blinded the king’s eyes, and deported him to Babylon. About one month later, Nebuzaradan slew the people of Jerusalem, knocked down the city wall, looted the Temple, and torched the palace, Temple, and city buildings. He took the survivors to Babylon, but left some peons to work the land under Gedaliah’s supervision.

Some scholars regard this situation as the backdrop of Obadiah for the following reasons. For one, Obadiah and the Historical Books both record a devastating invasion and pillaging of Jerusalem. According to Rooker, “The fall of Jerusalem is the only event in Israel’s history that qualifies for the tragic situation pictured in Obadiah 11.”<sup>6</sup> Moreover, other OT excerpts purportedly testify to Edom’s involvement in the sack of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in the sixth century (Ps 137:7; Lam 4:18–22; Ezek 25:12–14; 35:1–15).<sup>7</sup> To this list of passages Ogden adds Jer 49:7–22 as evidence for an early exilic date.<sup>8</sup> In addition, 1 Esdr 4:45 indicates that the Edomites burned the Temple (“the temple, which the Edomites burned when Judea was laid waste by the Chaldeans”). Stuart, who favors the sixth-century dating, does not depend upon this citation because 1 Esdras often gives spurious information.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the Arad ostraca seem to mention Edom as a military danger to Judah in the sixth century. Arad 24 includes a command for troops to be

<sup>3</sup> David W. Baker, *Joel, Obadiah, Malachi* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 147.

<sup>4</sup> Mark F. Rooker, “The Book of Obadiah,” in Eugene H. Merrill, Mark F. Rooker, and Michael A. Grisanti, *The World and the Word: An Introduction to the OT* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2011), 440.

<sup>5</sup> Douglas Stuart, *Hosea–Jonah* (WBC 31; Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 404.

<sup>6</sup> Rooker, “Obadiah,” 440.

<sup>7</sup> Stuart, *Hosea–Jonah*, 404.

<sup>8</sup> Graham S. Ogden, “Prophetic Oracles Against Foreign Nations and Psalms of Communal Lament: The Relationship of Psalm 137 to Jeremiah 49:7–22 and Obadiah,” *JSOT* 24 (1982): 96.

<sup>9</sup> Stuart, *Hosea–Jonah*, 404.

sent to Ramat-negev “lest the Edomites should enter there.”<sup>10</sup> The writer of Arad 40 claims that he is “unable to send” troops(?) to Ramat-negev. Pardee reconstructs the ostraca as follows:

[...] from Arad five and from Qinah [...] and send them to Ramat-negeb under Malkiyahu son of Qerabur. He is to hand them over to Elisha son of Yirmeyahu at Ramat-negeb lest anything happen to the city. This is an order from the king — a life-and-death matter for you. I send (this message) to warn you now: The(se) men (must be) with Elisha lest (the) Edom(ites) (should) enter there.

Your son Gemar[yahu], as well as Nehemyahu, (hereby) send [greetings to] (you) Malkiyahu. I bless [you to Yahweh]. And now, your servant has applied himself to what you ordered. [I (hereby) write] to my lord [everything that the man] wanted. [Eshyahu has come] from you but [he has not given] them any men. You know [the reports from] Edom. I sent them to [my] lord [before] evening. Eshyahu is staying [in my house.] He tried to obtain the report [but I would not give (it to him).] The king of Judah should know [that] we are unable to send the [X. This is] the evil which (the) Edom(ites) [have done].<sup>11</sup>

Guillaume argues that the ostraca address grazing rights rather than military movements, and concludes that “there is no evidence for Edomite infiltrations in the sixth century BCE.”<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, the ostraca may indeed serve as valid evidence.

Seven shortcomings impede the likeliness of a sixth-century fulfillment. First, Obadiah never alludes to the attack of Jerusalem by the Babylonians or the destruction of the city and the sanctuary. “Such an omission is striking in light of the fact that every other prophet who wrote of the fall of Jerusalem mentioned the adversary by name,” writes Busenitz, a critic of this view.<sup>13</sup> Undeterred, Renkema explains Obadiah’s omission this way: “No Yahwistic Judean would ever have ascribed the destruction of the temple to any one of Israel’s enemies.”<sup>14</sup>

Second, Obadiah depicts a demise of Edom, but little historical evidence exists for such an event in the mid-sixth century. As Block concedes, “We lack clear and unequivocal evidence for this event.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Nadav Na’aman, “Textual and Historical Notes on the Eliashib Archive from Arad,” *TA* 38 (2011): 89.

<sup>11</sup> Dennis Pardee, “Arad Ostraca,” in *COS* 3.84–85.

<sup>12</sup> Philippe Guillaume, “The Myth of the Edomite Threat. Arad Letters # 24 and 40,” in *Schrift und Sprache: Papers Read at the 10th Mainz International Colloquium on Ancient Hebrew (MICAH), Mainz, 28–30 October 2011* (ed. Reinhard G. Lehmann and Anna Elise Zernecke; Kleine Untersuchungen zur Sprache des Alten Testaments und seiner Umwelt 15; Kamen: Spenner, 2013), 106.

<sup>13</sup> Irvin A. Busenitz, *Joel and Obadiah* (Mentor Commentary; Fearn, UK: Christian Focus, 2003), 226–27.

<sup>14</sup> Johan Renkema, “Data Relevant to the Dating of the Prophecy of Obadiah,” in *Past, Present, Future: The Deuteronomistic History and the Prophets* (ed. Johannes C. de Moor and Harry F. van Rooy; Oudtestamentische Studiën 44; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 255.

<sup>15</sup> Daniel I. Block, *Obadiah: The Kingship Belongs to YHWH* (Hearing the Message of Scripture; Commentary on the OT 27; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 27.

Third, the Edomites bolster an attack on Jerusalem (Obad 11), but the Historical Books never mention this attack. In order to account for the conspicuous absence, Collins reasons that since Edom frequents the postexilic prophetic materials, “Jewish resentment against Edom in this period must have had some foundation.”<sup>16</sup>

Fourth, if Obadiah ministered soon after the sack of Jerusalem in 586 BC as many proponents maintain, that makes for an awkward reading of the imperatives in verses 12–14, requiring them to allude to prior events. Recognizing the difficulty, Finley claims that Obadiah uses the imperative for “rhetorical effect.”<sup>17</sup> Finley does not, however, establish a precedent for this kind of literary usage in the prophetic corpus.

Fifth, a setting in the sixth century forces proponents to locate Sepharad of verse 21 in Babylon since that is where the Chaldeans deported the Judahites in 598–597 and 586 BC. Block acknowledges that “the context requires a location in Babylon.”<sup>18</sup> This rules out other potential locations for the elusive site of Sepharad, namely, Spain, Sardis, Separda, and Hesperides.

Sixth, both the southern kingdom of Judah and the northern kingdom of Israel decimate the Edomites (v. 18). Adherents struggle to explain how this could happen while both kingdoms are in exile. Block concludes that the destroyers of Edom were the poorest people of Judah and Israel who remained in the land after their respective exiles.<sup>19</sup>

Seventh, Philistia and Phoenicia mentioned in verses 19–20 never arose as exilic antagonists.<sup>20</sup> These seven factors hamper the sixth-century option. In light of the absence of conclusive evidence, whether from the sixth century or the ninth, the reader may now entertain an alternative scenario.

### III. DISTANT ESCHATOLOGICAL SETTING

The present writer contends that Obadiah’s entire vision awaits a distant eschatological fulfillment. If we can demonstrate that Obadiah and other biblical prophecies describe the same set of events, and those prophecies prove to be eschatological in nature, then we have a good case that Obadiah also anticipates an eschatological fulfillment. The interpreter recognizes that the biblical prophets often describe the same circumstances but from different perspectives, much like the gospel writers.

1. *Evidence from Joel 2:32–3:21.* The book of Joel records the remarkable circumstances surrounding Yahweh’s judgment of the nations and the deliverance of his people. Joel’s prophecy resembles Obadiah’s, as six points of correspondence

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<sup>16</sup> John J. Collins, *Joel, Obadiab, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* (New Collegeville Bible Commentary 17; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 31.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas J. Finley, *Joel, Amos, Obadiab: An Exegetical Commentary* (Dallas: Biblical Studies Press, 2003), 300.

<sup>18</sup> Block, *Obadiab*, 101.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>20</sup> Busenitz, *Obadiab*, 227.

bear out. First, both texts state that “the Day of Yahweh is near” (Joel 3:14; Obad 15). Second, both texts speak of a time when Jerusalem or Zion will be holy: “Jerusalem will be holy” (Joel 3:17) and “Mount Zion ... will be holy” (Obad 17). Third, both texts predict that Gentiles will cast lots for God’s people: the nations “cast lots for my people” (Joel 3:3) and “foreigners ... cast lots for Jerusalem” (Obad 11). Fourth, both texts predict Yahweh’s revenge against the nations: “I will return recompense on your head” (Joel 3:4, 7) and “your dealings will return on your own head” (Obad 15). Fifth, both texts indicate that Edom will be judged because of their violence toward Judah: “Edom will become a desolate wilderness, because of the violence toward the Judahites (מִחַמַּס בְּנֵי יְהוּדָה)” (Joel 3:19) and “Because of violence to your brother Jacob (מִחַמַּס אָחִיךָ יַעֲקֹב), shame will cover you” (Obad 10). Sixth, both texts speak of refugees who escape Mount Zion: “on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be those who escape” (Joel 2:32) and “on Mount Zion there will be those who escape” (Obad 17). These six similarities suggest that both prophets describe the same situation. As Beecher concludes, “these two prophets had in mind the same group of events.”<sup>21</sup>

An earthly and eschatological setting best suits Joel 2:32–3:21. In the end time the inhabitants of Philistia, notably Tyre and Sidon, plunder Yahweh’s valuables, and sell the Judahites to the Greeks (3:4–6). Thereafter Yahweh judges the nations in the valley of decision, that is, the valley of Jehoshaphat (lit. “Yahweh judges”). Corpses accumulate as the Judge and his champions squash their detractors like grapes in a winepress (vv. 11–14). Yahweh roars from Jerusalem and creation trembles, but the saints rest secure (v. 16). Ultimately Judah and Jerusalem prosper (v. 1). They will experience agricultural abundance (“the hills drip with grape juice,” v. 18). The land flourishes because of ample irrigation. A spring even emanates from the Temple and enriches the Shittim Valley by the Arabah Sea (v. 18). At no time in antiquity have such circumstances transpired, a fact which suggests a yet future milieu. The multiple geographical and topographical references throughout Joel 3 assure the reader of an earthly setting. Indeed, the distant fulfillment of Joel and its links with Obadiah serve as one line of argumentation for a distant fulfillment of Obadiah.

2. *Evidence from Amos 9:11–12.* Judgment and restoration characterize the message of Amos 9. Both Amos and Obadiah speak of a time when the Israelites possess Edom and other nations. Amos reads, “At that time I will raise up the fallen booth of David, and wall up its breeches, and raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old, so that they may possess (יִרְשׁוּ) the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name” (Amos 9:11–12). According to Obadiah, “the inhabitants of the Negev will possess (יִרְשׁוּ) the hill country of Esau ... the deliverers will ascend Mount Zion to judge the hill country of Esau” (Obad 19, 21). Concerning the relationship between Obadiah and Amos 9, Nogalski rightly observes, “the sheer volume of lexical and thematic parallels, combined with observations regard-

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<sup>21</sup> Willis J. Beecher, “The Historical Situation in Joel and Obadiah,” *JBL* 8 (1888): 29.

ing the transitional markers of Obadiah that match those of Amos 9, requires an explanation that goes beyond coincidence.”<sup>22</sup>

Four reasons support the notion that Amos 9 is eschatological in nature. First, Yahweh will establish his people in their land, and never again will anyone uproot them (v. 15). To date the Israelites have never remained permanently in their land. Second, “the hills drip (נטף) with grape juice” (v. 13). Since the only other use of this line in Scripture appears in an eschatological setting (Joel 3:18, discussed above), this suggests an eschatological setting in Amos. Third, Yahweh will shake the nations as a sieve (Amos 9:9), an image associated exclusively with the future age (Isa 30:28). Forth, at the Jerusalem Council, James interprets Amos 9:11–12 as yet future (Acts 15:16–18). He ties the circumstances in Amos 9 to the second coming by interjecting the promise of Jesus, “I will return” (Acts 15:16). Thus, given the far-off future setting of Amos 9, together with the points of contact between Amos 9 and Obadiah, we have support for the far-off fulfillment of Obadiah.

3. *Evidence from Ezekiel 35:1–15.* Ezekiel’s oracle pertains to the desolation of the hill country of Seir and all Edom. Both Ezekiel and Obadiah date the fulfillment to “the time/day of their [Israel’s] disaster (אִיד)” (Ezek 35:5; Obad 13). According to both passages, the Edomites rejoice over the destruction of Israel: “you rejoiced (שִׂמְחָה) over the inheritance of the house of Israel because it was desolate” (Ezek 35:15) and “do not rejoice (שִׂמַח) over the Judahites in the day of their destruction” (Obad 12). In both texts Yahweh will transform Edom into a ghostland: “I will make the hill country of Seir a desolate wasteland, and cut off (כרת) from it the one who passes through and returns” (Ezek 35:7) and “everyone will be cut off (כרת) from the hill country of Esau by slaughter ... you will be cut off (כרת) forever” (Obad 9–10). Ironically Edom desires to “possess” (ירש) Israel (Ezek 35:10), but Israel “possesses” (ירש) Edom (Obad 19). Armerding recognizes the “close parallel between the circumstances reflected in Obadiah 10–14 and those of Ezekiel 35:5–9.”<sup>23</sup>

Ezekiel 35 plays out during “the time of the iniquity of the end,” עַתְּ עוֹן קֵץ (v. 5). This expression, a variation of Daniel’s “the time of the end” (discussed momentarily), appears two other times in Scripture (Ezek 21:25, 29). According to chapter 21, the rightful King trumps the wicked prince of Israel, which will not happen “until he comes, the one to whom the judgment belongs” (v. 27). So if Ezekiel’s prediction plays out in the end, Obadiah’s does as well, in light of the overlap of content.

4. *Evidence from Jer 49:7–22.* No passage of Scripture resembles Obadiah more than the oracle concerning Edom in Jeremiah 49. The extensive similarities appear side by side in the above Table (“Comparison of Obadiah and Jeremiah 49”). The

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<sup>22</sup> James D. Nogalski, “Not Just another Nation: Obadiah’s Placement in the Book of the Twelve,” in *Perspectives on the Formation of the Book of the Twelve: Methodological Foundations—Redactional Processes—Historical Insights* (ed. Rainer Albertz, James D. Nogalski, and Jakob Wöhrle; BZAW 433; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), 91.

<sup>23</sup> Carl E. Armerding, “Obadiah,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 8: *Daniel–Malachi* (ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland; rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 425.

similarities suggest that both prophets describe the same downfall of Edom. So if we can determine when the events of Jer 49:7–22 transpire, we will also know when the events of Obadiah transpire.

In order to determine when the circumstances of 49:7–22 unfold, one can perform a comparative analysis with the related prophecy in chapters 50–51 concerning the downfall of Babylon. Almost verbatim, 50:44–45 repeats 49:19–20. These excerpts describe a time when a ruler arises like a lion from the thickets of the Jordan and seizes a nation. The citizens go into exile and their land suffers destruction in accord with Yahweh’s predetermined plan. Essentially the only difference between the excerpts is the identity of the two subdued nations, Babylon versus Edom. Moreover, the subsequent verses parallel one another in the following way: “From the sound (מקול) of their fall, the earth will quake (רעש). There will be an outcry (צַעֲקָה). The noise of it will be heard (שמע) at the Red Sea” (Jer 49:21) and “From the shout (מקול), ‘Babylon has been seized,’ the earth will quake (רעש), and an outcry (צַעֲקָה) will be heard (שמע) among the nations” (Jer 51:46). How might the reader interpret this extensive and exclusive overlap? Perhaps Jeremiah employs stock language to depict the unrelated demises of Edom and Babylon, but such an interpretation does not allow the predictions as a whole to unfold according to their details. On the other hand, it appears more likely that the separate prophecies describe one and the same individual who arises like a lion and attacks Edom and Babylon. If that is the case, the fulfillment of both oracles comes to fruition within the same time period. Thus it behooves us to determine when the events of chapters 50–51 occur.

Chapters 50–51 might forecast the fall of Babylon to Cyrus in 539 BC, but eight factors mitigate this possibility. First, the invaders descend from the north (50:3), but the Persians originate from the east. Second, the attackers ruin Babylon (vv. 39–40; 51:29, 37, 43, 62), but Cyrus did not destroy the city. Third, Babylon’s walls collapse and the gates burn (50:15; 51:58), which did not happen when Cyrus seized control. Fourth, the prophet urges saints to run for their lives (50:8; 51:6, 15), but in 539 BC citizens did not flee during the relatively peaceful transition of power. Even Daniel stayed in Babylon after it fell (Dan 5:28–6:3). Fifth, when Babylon succumbs, all Israel will return to Zion and “join themselves to Yahweh in an everlasting covenant that will not be forgotten” (50:5; cf. 31:31; 32:40). Sixth, after Babylon falls, the Israelites shepherd prosperously in Bashan and Gilead, and no iniquity is found among them (50:19–20; cf. Mic 7:14, 19). No such scenario dovetails with Cyrus’s triumph in Babylon. Seventh, Babylon falls suddenly (Jer 50:44; 51:8), unlike the takeover by Cyrus. And eighth, the rubble from the destruction never gets reused to rebuild the city (51:26), which does not apply to Cyrus’s peaceful takeover or any other restoration of Babylon in past history.<sup>24</sup>

Since the past-historical demises of Babylon do not accord easily with the data of chapters 50–51, this allows for a far-off fall of Babylon, which in turn suggests

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<sup>24</sup> Andrew M. Woods, “Have the Prophecies in Revelation 17–18 about Babylon Been Fulfilled? Part 5,” *BSac* 170 (2013): 97–98.

a far-off fall of Edom in Jer 49:7–22, which in turn points to a far-off fulfillment of Obadiah—connections based on the inextricable links among these passages.

5. *Evidence from Jer 25:12–38.* According to Jeremiah, Yahweh will judge the nations of the world because of their rebellion. Jeremiah and Obadiah both use the imagery of Edom and “all the nations” drinking from the cup of wrath. The God of Israel instructs Jeremiah, “Take this cup of the wine of wrath from my hand and force all the nations to whom I am about to send you to drink it. They will drink and stagger and go mad because of the sword which I am about to send among them” (vv. 15–16). A long list of nations ensues, a list which includes Edom (v. 21). Similarly, Obadiah announces, “just as you drank on my holy hill, all the nations will drink continually. They will drink, gulp down, and be as if they had never existed” (Obad 16). The cup of wrath imagery also contributes to the oracle concerning Edom in Jer 49:12.

Whereas Jer 25:1–11 foresees Judah’s seventy-year captivity, verses 12–38 anticipates a time “after the seventy years are completed” (v. 12). All the inhabitants of the earth enrage Yahweh, and across the globe, all the kingdoms of the earth fall. Babylon (Sheshach) falls last, and “many peoples and great kings will enslave them—even them” (v. 14). No such situation matches ancient history. Even Nebuchadnezzar’s rampage after the battle of Carchemish in 605 BC does not fit these circumstances. The judgment of the nations comes *after* the seventy years, not during. Moreover, the fall of Babylon to Cyrus the Persian in 539 BC was relatively peaceful, largely an administrative takeover, and even welcomed by many Babylonians. As the Babylonian Chronicle puts it, “On 16th Ugbaru, governor of Gutium, and the army of Cyrus entered Babylon without battle. Afterwards, after Nabonidus had retreated, he was taken in Babylon. . . . On 3rd Marcheswan Cyrus entered Babylon.”<sup>25</sup> According to the Cyrus Cylinder,

He [Marduk] made him [Cyrus] enter his city Babylon without fighting or battle; he saved Babylon from hardship . . . All the people of Babylon . . . bowed to him and kissed his feet. They rejoiced at his kingship and their faces shone . . . they greeted him with gladness and praised his name. . . . When I [Cyrus] entered Babylon in a peaceful manner, I took up my lordly reign in the royal palace amidst rejoicing and happiness. . . . My vast army moved about Babylon in peace; I did not permit anyone to frighten (the people of) [Sumer] and Akkad. I sought the welfare of the city of Babylon and all its sacred centers. As for the citizens of Babylon, . . . I relieved their weariness and freed them from their service.<sup>26</sup>

Such a description hardly sounds like Babylon drinking the cup of Yahweh’s wrath and being enslaved by many nations. In light of the evidence, Jer 25:12–38 awaits an eschatological fulfillment, a notion that undergirds the eschatological fulfillment of Obadiah, given that both predict the judgment of Edom and all the nations.

6. *Evidence from Lam 4:21–22.* The final verses of Lamentations 4 look to a time when Edom undergoes judgment: “He will punish your iniquity, O daughter

<sup>25</sup> Alan Millard, “The Babylonian Chronicle,” in *COS* 1.468.

<sup>26</sup> Mordechai Cogan, “Cyrus Cylinder,” in *COS* 2.315.

of Edom.” Just as in the book of Jeremiah, Lam 4:21 and Obad 16 both use the imagery of God’s enemies drinking from the cup of his wrath. Edom’s judgment in Lam 4:21–22 will take hold in a distant future era when Yahweh no longer exiles the Israelites (v. 22). Chou agrees that these verses pertain to the eschatological judgment of Edom. In considering the Biblical predictions concerning Edom, he states, “Edom’s fate is tied with the fate of every country; thus the resolution of the issue with Edom marks the resolution of world history. . . . Lam 4:21–22 substantiates that redemptive history is heading in the direction predicted by the prophets.”<sup>27</sup> The corollaries between Obadiah and Lamentations, coupled with the remote setting of Edom’s judgment in Lamentations, point to a remote setting for Obadiah’s oracle.

7. *Evidence from Num 24:17–19.* The story of Balaam the prophet in Numbers 22–24 includes a brief prediction concerning Edom. Balak the king of Moab hires Balaam to curse the Israelites, but instead, Balaam continues to bless them. The prophecies of Balaam and Obadiah bear a similarity. Both prophecies speak of Edom as a possession. Numbers 24:18 reads, “Edom will be a possession (יְרֻשָׁה), and Seir, its enemies, will be a possession, but Israel will wax powerful.” Obadiah 19 reveals that “*the inhabitants of the Negev will possess (ירש) the hill country of Esau.*”

The circumstances of Balaam’s vision in Num 24:14–19 unfold during the eschaton for the three reasons. First, Balaam predicts the fate of the Moabites and Edomites “in the days to come.” This phrase appears fourteen times in the OT.<sup>28</sup> Each prophecy that uses the phrase anticipates, at least in part, the eschatological epoch.<sup>29</sup> Second, Balaam assigns his vision to a future time by using a chronological marker: “I see him, but not now (עַתָּה).” Third, the “star” and the “scepter” and the “one from Jacob [who] exercises dominion” refer to the Messiah at his second coming. Verse 17 announces that “a star shall tread *the winepress* from Jacob, a scepter shall rise from Israel.” The action of “treading the winepress” describes what the Messiah will do to his foes when he returns to earth. He will trample his enemies like grapes in a winepress. In the end time, the Messiah treads the winepress in Bozrah (Isa 63:3, 6), Megiddo (Rev 19:15), and near Jerusalem (Rev 14:20). These reasons secure the setting of Balaam’s vision near the time of the second coming. Numbers 24 shows two things in relation to Obadiah: (1) that Edom as nation will exist at the second coming, and (2) that Edom will be a possession.

8. *Evidence from Isa 11:14.* Isaiah 11, the prophecy concerning the glorious reign of Jesse’s descendant, corresponds to Obadiah. Both prophecies indicate that the Israelites will subdue Edom and the land of the Philistines. According to Isaiah,

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<sup>27</sup> Abner Chou, “Lamentations,” in Abner Chou, Walter C. Kaiser Jr., and Tiberius Rata, *Jeremiah and Lamentations* (electronic ed.; Evangelical Exegetical Commentary; Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2014), n.p.

<sup>28</sup> Gen 49:1; Num 24:14; Deut 4:30; 31:29; Isa 2:2; Jer 23:20; 30:24; 48:47; 49:39; Ezek 38:16; Dan 2:28 [BA]; 10:14; Hos 3:5; Mic 4:1.

<sup>29</sup> Robert Duncan Culver, *The Earthly Reign of Our Lord with His People: Biblical Millennialism without Covenantal or Dispensational Presuppositions* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.; Rushford, MN: Vinegar Hill, 1998), 116–18.

Judah and Ephraim “will swoop down on the slopes of the Philistines in the west. Together they will pillage the easterners—Edom and Moab will be subjugated (מְשֻׁלָּח), and the Ammonites will be subjected to them” (v. 14). Similarly, Obadiah reveals that “there will be no escapees among the descendants of Esau ... *the inhabitants of the Negev will possess/dispossess (יִרְשׁוּ)* the hill country of Esau, and the Shephelah the Philistine plain” (Obad 18–19).

A distant fulfillment accommodates Isaiah 11. Justice, faithfulness, and wisdom characterize the rule of Jesse’s descendant (vv. 1–5). In the future the animal kingdom becomes docile. Wolves live with lambs, leopards rest with goats, and lions submit to children. Herbivores replace carnivores and omnivores, and the knowledge of Yahweh goes global (vv. 6–9). The Lord will release his people from their worldwide dispersion (vv. 11–13). This milieu, in conjunction with its overlap of Obadiah, supports a distant setting for Obadiah.

9. *Evidence from Jer 30:3–11.* Trouble looms for Israel and the nations, but in the end, Israel experiences restoration, says Jeremiah. Both Jeremiah and Obadiah anticipate (1) the return of the Israelites from exile (Jer 30:3, 8–10; Obad 20); (2) the demise of “all the nations” (Jer 30:11; Obad 15–16); and (3) the time of Jacob’s distress. Jeremiah’s expression, “the time of Jacob’s distress (צָרָה)” (30:7), resembles Obadiah’s phraseology: “your brother Jacob ... your brother’s day ... the day of distress (צָרָה)” (vv. 11–12). In the future age, no one will subjugate the Israelites, and they will honor Yahweh their God and David their king (Jer 30:8–9).

10. *Evidence from Isa 34:1–17 and 63:1–6.* In these twin prophecies Yahweh causes a bloodbath in Bozrah, Edom. The majestic one exacts revenge: “Yahweh will have a day of vengeance (נִקְמָה), a year of recompense (שְׁלוֹם) for the cause of Zion” (Isa 34:8) and “the day of vengeance (נִקְמָה) was in my heart, and my year of recompense (גְּאוּלִים) has come” (63:4). According to chapter 34, the sword of Yahweh will descend from heaven, exterminate the citizens of Edom, and wild creatures will possess the land, a wasteland of pitch and brimstone. In a question and answer style, 63:1–6 relays a conversation between an onlooker (Isaiah) and the righteous one. The onlooker sees the righteous one, a one-man army, coming from “Edom” (אֱדוֹם) with “red” (אָדָם) blood-stained clothing, after treading the winepress of his wrath. These prophecies call to mind Rev 19:11–15, in which the righteous one will descend from heaven to wage war and tread the winepress of his wrath. A sword projects from his mouth, and blood soaks his clothing. This helps demonstrate that the prophecies of Isaiah, like Obadiah, pertain to the end-time demise of Edom.

11. *Evidence from Dan 11:41.* Daniel anticipates a time when the willful king magnifies himself, blasphemes the God of gods, and sustains an attack by the kings of the south and the north. During this time a king invades Israel, but the Transjordan, including Edom, escapes his clutches: “He will enter the Beautiful Land, and many will fall, but these will be rescued from him: Edom, Moab, and the foremost of the Ammonites” (Dan 11:41). The prophet places these events in “the time of the end,” עַתְּ קֵץ (vv. 35, 40). Twice this expression appears later in the vision (12:4, 9). Together the four uses of the expression, linked chronologically by

“at that time” (v. 1), point to a distant era when a resurrection takes place (v. 2).<sup>30</sup> Thus 11:41 confirms that Edom plays a role in the eschaton.

12. *Evidence concerning the reunification of Israel.* According to Obad 18, the southern kingdom of Jacob and the northern kingdom of Joseph will unite and overtake Edom. This accords well with other eschatological prophecies that envision a reunification of the southern and northern kingdoms as they inherit the land. At that time “they will no longer be two nations and no longer be divided into two kingdoms” (Ezek 37:22). Other pertinent excerpts regarding Israel’s unity include Isa 11:12–13; Jer 3:18; 23:5–6; 31:31; 33:7; 50:4–5; Hos 1:11; and Zech 10:6.

13. *Evidence from Heb 11:20.* The writer of Hebrews provides an inspired interpretation of the patriarchal blessings in Gen 27:27–29 and verses 39–40. He reveals that Jacob (Israel) and Esau (Edom) will receive a blessing in the distant future: “By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come” (Heb 11:20). The immoral and godless Esau did indeed receive a promise of blessing, but he really wanted a promise of *the* blessing, that is, Jacob’s covenantal blessing: “when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected” (12:17). Regardless, the NT writer recognizes Edom as a national entity in the future.

14. *A word on the issue of hermeneutics and spiritual interpretation.* The prophecies concerning Edom in the HB frequently employ geographical, topographical, political, and ethnic references which testify to an actual and earthly setting. As Robinson says of Obadiah,

The text refers on numerous occasions to known places—Teman, the Shephelah, the Negeb, Jerusalem, or Samaria. Even place names such as Zarephath and Sepharad, which are less well known and so might seem to locate the vision in an exotic realm, are still taken on the same realistic level as the others because nothing marks them as distinctive from the run of known places. The agents of the vision are also residents of the real world—Edom, Judah, Philistines, Benjamin.<sup>31</sup>

In no way does Israel represent the church in Obadiah’s prophecy. Never in history has the church returned from exile or inherited the land in the way that Obadiah depicts. As Wilson puts it, “the theology of the Bible is inextricably interwoven into the chronology, places, and circumstances of Israel’s history.”<sup>32</sup>

15. *A word on the issue of multiple fulfillments.* The possibility exists that Obadiah envisions multiple fulfillments of his vision. For instance, perhaps a portion of Obadiah depicts an immediate near scenario within the prophet’s lifetime (e.g., vv. 1–14), whereas the remaining portion describes a remote eschatological scenario (e.g., vv. 15–21). Two factors negate this possibility. First, the prophecy transpires in one and only one era. The temporal markers of Obad 8–15 bind the events to

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<sup>30</sup> Gerhard Pfandl, “Daniel’s “Time of the End,”” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 7 (1996): 143–44.

<sup>31</sup> Robert B. Robinson, “Levels of Naturalization in Obadiah,” *JSOT* 40 (1988): 88–89.

<sup>32</sup> Marvin R. Wilson, *Exploring Our Hebraic Heritage: A Christian Theology of Roots and Revival* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 22.

one time period or “day.” These markers include “on that day” and “on the day” and “your brother’s day” and “the day of his misfortune” and “in the day of their destruction” and “in the day of distress” and “in the day of their disaster” and “in the day of their distress” and “the Day of Yahweh.” This time period has yet to play out. Robinson puts it this way: “If the reference to ‘that day’ in v. 8 is connected to the day of the Lord in v. 15, and there is no other candidate within the literary context of the book, then the judgment on Edom is not precisely historical but an eschatological event.”<sup>33</sup> As Snyman says, “In view of the prominent occurrence the term *yom* (yhwh) takes in the rest of the book, it would be quite strange if the term *yom* in verse 8 would denote something completely different than in the rest of the book.”<sup>34</sup> Second, the related eschatological prophecies from Jeremiah 49 and Joel correspond to all parts of Obadiah’s oracle—beginning, middle, and end. Thus the parallel prophecies and temporal markers dissuade the reader of the notion that the oracle receives multiple fulfillments in different eras.

16. *A word on the issue of imminence and the near fulfillment of prophecy.* The book of Obadiah does not depict events near the time of composition, as argued. Biblical prophecies do not necessitate a near fulfillment. As Gary Smith reminds us, “Many eschatological or apocalyptic prophecies will have no immediate connection to the events of that [immediate] time or people in the prophet’s immediate context.”<sup>35</sup> A prediction need not materialize within the lifetime of the prophet, or even within the millennium. Even statements of imminence, such as “the Day of Yahweh is near” (Obad 15), do not require an immediate fulfillment. After all, we still anticipate the fulfillment of imminent predictions such as “the end of all things is near” (1 Pet 4:7) and “I am coming quickly” (Rev 22:20).

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Obadiah’s entire oracle awaits an earthly and eschatological fulfillment. The circumstances of the book unfold in a future age when the Edomites, Israelites, and all the nations experience tribulation. At that time the Israelites will finally inherit their land, and “the kingdom will belong to Yahweh” (Obad 21). Since the prophet’s vision has not yet transpired, the date of composition need not relate to Jehoram’s reign in the ninth century or the Babylonian invasion in the sixth century.

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<sup>33</sup> Robinson, “Obadiah,” 91.

<sup>34</sup> S. D. Snyman, “Yom (YHWH) in the Book of Obadiah,” in *Goldene Äpfel in silbernen Schalen: Collected Communications to the XIIIth Congress of the International Organization for the Study of the OT, Leuven 1989* (ed. Klaus-Dietrich Schunck and Matthias Augustin; BEATAJ 20; Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1992), 88.

<sup>35</sup> Gary V. Smith, *Interpreting the Prophetic Books: An Exegetical Handbook* (HOTE; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014), 121.