

Introduction to Obadiah

Where is it in the Bible?

Obadiah is the thirty-first book in the Christian Old Testament and is found between Amos and Jonah. It is the third book of the Minor Prophets; the term “minor” refers to the length of the books, not to their importance. In the Hebrew Bible, these books follow Ezekiel at the end of the Prophets section and are grouped together in the Book of the Twelve in the same order as found in Christian Bibles. Obadiah is the shortest book in the Old Testament.

Who wrote it?

Obadiah 1:1 says that the book is “the vision of Obadiah”, but nothing is known about this prophet. There are more than a dozen men with this name in the Old Testament, but none of them can be clearly identified with this writer. Jewish tradition connected the prophet with an official in Ahab's court (1 Kings 18:3-4); that seems unlikely. Some scholars have suggested that the author chose this name as a pseudonym because he wanted to remain anonymous.

When was it written?

Since the fall of Jerusalem is described in Obadiah 11-14, the book must have been written sometime after that, possibly during the Babylonian exile (587-538 B.C.).

What is it about?

The book of Obadiah announces judgment on Edom, Judah's neighbor to the southeast, for its part in the fall of Jerusalem and looks forward to the day when Edom will be destroyed and Israel and Judah will be restored.

How is it structured?

- I. Edom's Pride and Impending Judgment (1-9)
- II. Edom's Offenses (10-14)
- III. The Day of the Lord (15-18)
- IV. The Final Triumph (19-21)

What are some things to look for?

- **Jacob and Esau:** The connects the struggles between Judah and Edom to those between Jacob and Esau. This goes back to the tradition that the Edomites were descended from Esau (Genesis 36:1), the twin brother of Jacob, who was the forefather of the Israelites.
- **Retributive Justice:** Obadiah clearly states (v. 15) the Edom will be punished for its betrayal of Judah. More generally, God will punish all nations for their sins.
- **Similarities with Jeremiah:** The oracle against Edom which begins the book has many similarities with Jeremiah 49:7-22. Scholars disagree about whether Obadiah relied on Jeremiah or vice-versa or if both drew from a third source.