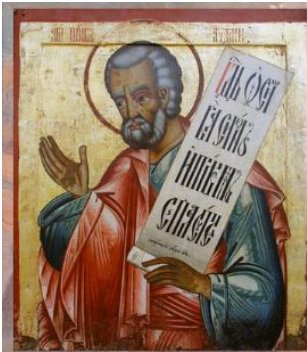
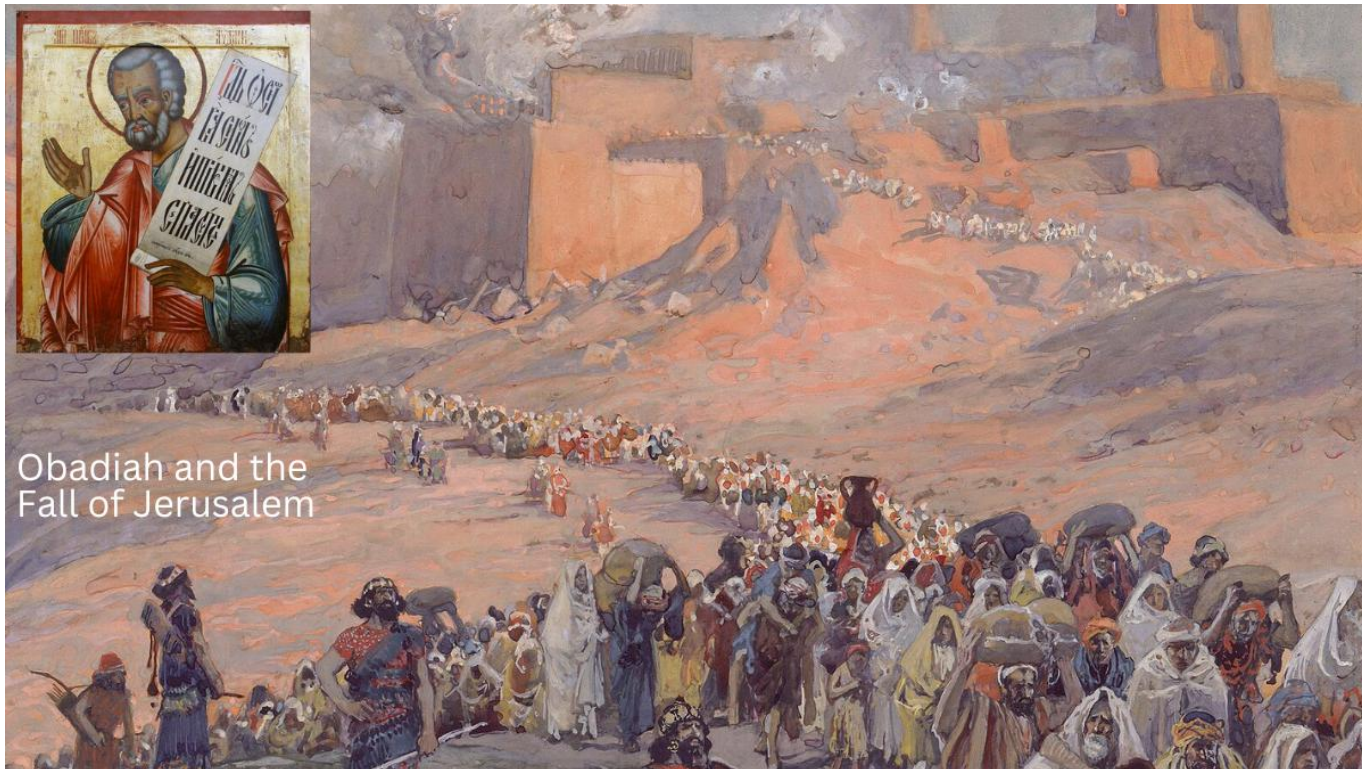


Obadiah and Edom



Obadiah and the Fall of Jerusalem



By its opening verse, it is clear that Psalm 137 is written by the psalmist while a refugee during the Babylonian Exile following the destruction of Jerusalem (Zion) in 587 BC: “*By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat weeping when we remembered Zion.*” (Psalm 137:1) From history and scripture we know that the Babylonian Empire was the instrumental cause of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple - but they apparently had assistance. The psalmist calls out to God: “*Remember, LORD, against Edom that day at Jerusalem. They said: ‘Level it, level it down to its foundations!’*” (Ps 137:7) Whether Edom participated in the destruction or merely “cheered” Babylon’s efforts, the long simmering feud between Judah and Edom became a fixture in Jewish thought. The *Book of Obadiah*, the shortest among the twelve minor prophets, is a single twenty-one-verse oracle against Edom. Who is Edom and why is the prophet Odadiah so focused on them?

Edom occupied the mountains southeast of Israel and south of the Dead Sea. The Hebrew Bible described the Edomites' original country as stretching from the Sinai peninsula as far as the Gulf of Aqaba. According to *Genesis*, the son of Isaac, Esau and his descendants settled in the land after Esau had squandered his inheritance for a bowl of soup (Gen 26:25 ff.) and his brother Jacob, deceiving their father, received the blessing intended for Esau (Gen 27). Needless to say there was animosity between them.

As early as the first book of Scripture, Genesis 36:31-43 lists the kings of Edom “*before any Israelite king reigned.*” By the time Moses was leading the people out of slavery



into the wilderness, Edom was a formidable presence in the region. Moses asked the king of Edom for passage through his land, along the “King's Highway”, on their way to Canaan, but the king refused permission (Numbers 20:14-20) Accordingly, they detoured around the country because of Edom’s show of force. Deuteronomy 2:4-6 recounts the episode but remarks that God ordered them to pass another way rather than wage war: “*be very careful not to come in conflict with them, for I will not give you so much as a foot of their land, since I have already given Esau possession of the highlands of Seir.*” (Gen 36:6-8).

If you are beginning to understand the acrimony first begun ca. 1400 BC in the rift between Esau and Jacob was still active in the tribal memories 900 years later, you are seeing part of the story of Obadiah.

During that 900 year period, there was no point at which Judah and Edom were allies. During the reigns of King Saul, David and Solomon, the Edomites were a vassal state of Judah, several times attempting to rebel. By the time of King Jehoshaphat of Judah (~100 years after Solomon) the Edomites invaded Judea in conjunction with Ammon and Moab, but the invaders turned against one another and were all destroyed (2 Chronicles 20:10–23). Subsequent revolts and reprisals were frequent, and after this time Judah never subdued Edom completely.

Edom faced its own pressures on its Eastern borders from the Nabateans. This created a period in which the Edomites slowly migrated into southern Judah, were tolerated as displaced persons, and these people became known as the Idumaeans to the world (always Edomites to the Jews). By the time of the destruction of the kingdom Judah/Jerusalem/Temple by Nebuchadnezzar II in 587/86 BC, the Edomites were already occupying lands and villages as far north as Hebron, taking advantage of the weakened state of Judah in the 60 years prior to the arrival of the Babylonians. Whether the Edomites simply cheered on the invaders or were part of the assault, their betrayal and treachery is remembered in various OT books: Psalm 137:7; Lamentations 4:21 and following (*ff*); Ezekiel 25:12–14 and 35:5*ff*. The non-canonical 1 Esdras 4:45 preserves a tradition that “the Edomites burned the temple when Judah was devastated by the Chaldeans.”

It might be said that the *Book of Obadiah* is a bitter, prophetic cry for vengeance against Edom for its pride and its crimes.

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