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Unveiling Messiah in Obadiah: Kingdom, Apocalypse, Eschatology

Abstract

This study analyzes a messianic approach of interpretation in Obadiah, the shortest book of the Old Testament. Understanding such a hermeneutic could prove useful for understanding messianic concepts throughout the canon. While Obadiah offers hope for God's remnant, the book also presents significant interpretive challenges. Despite these difficulties, key themes emerge, including the importance of God's faithful ones, the animosity between Israel and Edom, and the promise of ultimate divine judgment. Building on the established link between Obadiah and other Bible texts, this paper presents a book introduction, arguments and rationale for the messianic interpretation, and a brief application of this paradigm to the text. The analysis utilizes Scripture, scholarly sources, and the lens of messianic hermeneutics.

Keywords

Messianic Prophecy, Old Testament, Book of Obadiah, Biblical Interpretation, Hermeneutics, Eschatology, Ecclesiology, Christocentrism

Cover Page Footnote

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Introduction

This paper seeks to unveil Messiah in Obadiah, a worthwhile effort for understanding Messiah in both the OT and the New Testament (NT). Obadiah is the shortest book of the Old Testament (OT), and likely the most understudied. After Jerusalem suffered a painful defeat before Judah's enemies, Obadiah offered a future hope. Today, this book offers God's *remnant* the future hope of Messiah's return *in perpetuum*. In reality, this book remains difficult due to its brevity, its apocalyptic language and moral questions about justice. Strzałkowska wrote that Obadiah's "difficulties are manifested in its linguistic and textual layers... content, theology, and interpretation."¹ However, despite these challenges, key content is evident: 1) the importance of God's *remnant*; 2) the apocalyptic-level enmity of Israel and Edom; and 3) final justice for the nations. Jenson confirmed that: "Christian interpreters can draw...lines of continuity between Obadiah and the [NT]"² In keeping with this conclusion, this paper presents a four-party analysis: 1) an introduction to Obadiah; 2) three distinct arguments supporting the messianic view; 3) the specific rationale for this interpretation type; and 4) a brief commentary applying the paradigm. This paper uses scholarly sources and Scripture citations from the *New American Standard Bible* (NASB) to interpret the text with a messianic hermeneutic.

Literary Features

Authorship

Establishing authorship in Obadiah is possible. Timmer confirmed that this prophet did not appear elsewhere in the OT: "The prophet Obadiah...is mentioned only here in Scripture."³ Obadiah did not name his father or his tribe. Yet, he was a literate, educated Israelite. This clue appears by naming himself as author and from his superb writing. He resided in Judah and witnessed one of several attacks on Jerusalem. He was born before the temple's destruction in 587 BC. This paper will conclude Obadiah likely lived after (not before) Assyria deported Israel (2 Kings 18:11); fulfilling Amos 2:6. If true, then Obadiah would have prophesied in one of three places: 1) in Babylon as a captive;⁴ 2) in Judah

¹ Barbara Strzałkowska, "The Book of Obadiah in the Septuagint," *Collectanea Theologica* 91, No. 5 (2021): 63.

² Philip P. Jenson, *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah* (New York: T & T Clark, 2008), 9.

³ Daniel C. Timmer, *Obadiah, Jonah and Micah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2021), 38.

⁴ See "Judah [in] exile" (2 Ki. 22:22, NASB), Ezekiel "among the exiles" (Ez. 1:1), and "sons of Israel" (Dan. 1:3).

where survivors had to stay (Jer. 42:19); or 3) in the refugee camps of Egypt.⁵ Because of other literary clues (discussed below), Judah was his likeliest location and Babylon was the invading power.

What did the Hebrew name *Obadiā* (עֲבַדְיָהוּ) mean? Phillips confirmed its meaning as “servant of YHWH.”⁶ Indeed, he was the servant who witnessed Jerusalem’s disaster. Phillips confirmed that the Dead Sea Scrolls attest to Obadiah’s book in two Hebrew scrolls: 1) 4QXIIg (first century BC) at Qumran; and 2) MurXII Minor Prophets (second century AD); found “south of Qumran in a cave in Wadi Murabba’at... [and here] Obadiah is nearly complete albeit somewhat damaged.”⁷ Regrettably, the Minor Prophets do not appear in either Josephus or Philo. Despite these initial clues, early church documents remained largely silent about Obadiah. This was due to time passing and the fires of war and persecution. No surviving texts of ante-Nicene times (pre-325 AD) discuss Obadiah. Fortunately, Jerome’s commentary on Obadiah, after sending it to his friend, is still available.⁸ Schaff even concluded Chrysostom “wrote commentaries on the whole Bible,”⁹ which would have included Obadiah. Unfortunately, early Christian canon lists focused on NT books and thus were silent on Obadiah. Yet, the Septuagint (LXX) copies of the post-Nicene era (e.g. Vaticanus, Sinaiticus, Alexandrinus) confirm the presence of Obadiah in the Christian biblical library.¹⁰ Overall, these facts confirm that beyond Jerome and Chrysostom, commentaries on Obadiah did exist, though they are now long lost.

Theme

According to Phillips, the *eye-for-an-eye* concept (see Dt. 19:21) connects Obadiah’s structure “all under the umbrella of the *lex talionis*.”¹¹ Phillips calls this “the defining principle of YHWH’s justice.”¹² Phillips is right to stress this unique type of justice in the book. This concept unites the book’s national trauma with the high expectation of retribution for such violence. As a law-keeping prophet,

⁵ Obadiah could have gone to Egypt like Jeremiah and Baruch who went against their will (Jer. 43:4-6).

⁶ Elaine A. Phillips, *Obadiah, Jonah & Micah* (London: Apollos, 2022), 25.

⁷ Phillips, *Obadiah, Jonah & Micah*, 33.

⁸ Jerome, *Three Books of Commentary on the Prophet Amos*, in Thomas P. Scheck, ed., *Ancient Christian Texts, Commentaries on the Twelve Prophets: Volume 2* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 111.

⁹ Philip Schaff, *A Selected Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 9* (U.K.: Wipf & Stock, 2022), 17.

¹⁰ Alfred Rahlfs and Robert Hanhart, *Septuaginta*, (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), Vol. 2, 524-6.

¹¹ Phillips, *Obadiah, Jonah & Micah*, 28.

¹² *Ibid.*, 32.

Obadiah described God's justice in line with His Law. Without mentioning Moses, the book rightly presumes God's authority and power over nations. Further, this interlocking concept helps prove the theological unity of the OT. Chou confirms this very idea: "in like manner, the major and minor prophets refer to past revelation."¹³ This unity works best in the interpretation that complements God's divine plan in all the canonical books, i.e. a messianic hermeneutic. This approach balances the theme of God's justice (in all times) and His millennia-long plan of salvation. Timmer summed up this concept well: "Obadiah presents God's justice against sin, and his mercy in salvation, in two overlapping perspectives."¹⁴

Genre

The book of Obadiah is manifestly a unit of two genres: 1) a prophetic book of prose; and, 2) an apocalyptic book with eschatological purpose. Regarding the prophetic element, Sweeney notes: "At its most basic generic level, Obad 1b–21 must be considered as an example of the oracles concerning the nations..."¹⁵ Given that Obadiah attested to a supernatural *vision* (*hazun*; חֲזוֹן) in v.1 and that his place among the Minor Prophets is certain, the prophetic genre of this book is also certain. On this prophetic foundation (a divinely-inspired message), interpreters can also approach Obadiah as apocalyptic literature, which does not require specific wild symbols like locusts or dragons. Obadiah is still an apocalyptic genre because of the unique symbols and images this brief book contains—no matter how different from Daniel, Ezekiel, or Revelation.

Two points suffice to start. First, the divine Author singled out the nation of *Edom* to appoint an eschatological judgment for "all the nations" (Ob. 15-16). Beale, a prolific writer on the apocalyptic genre and the NT's use of the OT, discussed biblical metaphors: "Therefore, comparison or analogy in metaphor occurs when conceptual word boundaries are transgressed."¹⁶ Like Obadiah, it is unusual today to take the name of a nation (e.g. the United States) to signify all nations. Therefore, Beale's test for biblical metaphors confirms that Edom referencing all nations in the end time is a *biblical metaphor*.

Second, Ob. 15 uses the "day of YHWH" as a literary transition point. This famous phrase in the OT dramatically reveals (and further confirms) that the symbol of ancient *Edom* represents the apocalyptic reality of all future nations

¹³ Abner Chou, *The Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2018), 53.

¹⁴ Timmer, *Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, 38.

¹⁵ Marvin A. Sweeney, et al., *Berit Olam: the Twelve Prophets: Vol. 1: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2000), 300.

¹⁶ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 91.

opposed to God and His Messiah (Ps. 2:2).¹⁷ David W. Baker confirms that this book has more than one genre, including prose: “most authors, contemporary and biblical, employ more than one literary genre.”¹⁸ Baker affirmed that a mixture of genres is typical for biblical books. Thus it is reasonable to also consider that Obadiah could also have a *mixture* of genres. By contrast, Timmer describes Obadiah as simply prophetic genre, as he explained: “Obadiah contains only two types of literature: oracles of judgment (vv. 2–4, 5–9, 10–14) and an oracle that promises deliverance.”¹⁹ This is reasonable to conclude since the prophetic genre can also have sub-genres, i.e. judgment and deliverance—yet, without ruling out the apocalyptic genre as a second category.

Lastly, interpreters can consider maintaining a canonical perspective that opens up the right hermeneutical keys to otherwise obscure, metaphorical, and difficult passages. On this note, Köstenberger advocates the holistic study of the canon: “For this reason, we will do well to develop a good grasp of the biblical storyline as a whole before looking at specific genre characteristics and linguistic features of a particular text.”²⁰ This point is of utmost importance. The biblical story makes sense in all the canonical books. It points to the Messiah’s cross from Genesis and it looks back to it from Revelation. Lastly, Köstenberger gives a concrete example for approaching apocalyptic literature: “Therefore, read Revelation with an informed sensitivity to the symbolic nature of its language and imagery.”²¹ The same applies to Obadiah.

Form & Structure

Obadiah’s literary form offers information about its genre and its meaning. Sweeney noted that Obadiah “is formulated as a messenger speech.”²² Obadiah was surely a divine letter to Edom evident from words like *messenger* and *report*

¹⁷ Three anticipated objections to Obadiah’s apocalyptic style are as follows: 1) hermeneutical systems that prioritize consensus on history and archaeology over theological unity would deny an apocalyptic prediction; 2) higher critical approaches emphasizing audience reception over authorial intent would stress that Hebrew readers would grasp no real apocalyptic message; and 3) finely-tuned doctrinal systems (i.e. dependent on theological minutiae all working together like irreducible complexity) allow in very few interpretations that threaten their doctrinal consensus.

¹⁸ David W. Baker, “Obadiah,” in Alexander, T. Desmond, et al., *Obadiah, Jonah and Micah* (Nottingham, England: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 45-6.

¹⁹ Timmer, *Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, 42.

²⁰ Andreas J. Köstenberger and Richard D. Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 152.

²¹ Köstenberger, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation*, 452.

²² Sweeney, *Berit Olam*, 295.

(Ob. 1).²³ Timmer writes that Obadiah's structure, "consists of three separate oracles and a final announcement of salvation."²⁴ This salvation issue is crucial to interpreting the book's second half. Keywords in the text help determine transitions between halves. One such "key word throughout is 'day.'"²⁵ A thematic transition such as this typically involves "linking involved repetitions of keywords, grammatical forms, or other linguistic material."²⁶ Baker sees transition words in verses 15-16: "dealing with 'all the nations.'"²⁷ These words will appear again for the *day of YHWH* and its commentary.

Further, Obadiah's place in the canon among the Twelve, especially Amos, Joel, and Malachi, helps with its interpretation. Renkema explains Obadiah's place among the Twelve: "Obadiah was placed after Amos in the Masoretic canon on the basis of prophecy of salvation in Amos 9:12."²⁸ Tov confirms that among the Dead Sea Scrolls (including Wadi Murabba'at): "The Minor prophets were regarded as one book: 4QXII^b [150-125 BC], MurXII [125 AD] and 8HevXII gr."²⁹

Tov stands against the traditional reading which keeps the books apart.³⁰ Nogalski confirms such traditions: "Evidence from rabbinic sources and the Masoretes also points to a tradition that the Twelve Prophets were treated as a canonical group."³¹ These scholars help to confirm that: 1) Obadiah was likely written and distributed during the exile; 2) it was likely not a later invention; and, 3) scribes, soon after the exile, deliberately chose the Minor Prophets' final order based on interpretation, not chronology.

Yet, some scholars opt for a later completion of Obadiah to a *final form*. Nogalski concluded that Obadiah reached its "final form in the postexilic period."³² Likewise, Phillips separated an *initial form* that was oral from a *final text* in discussing: "the interface between the initial oral discourse and the text that is preserved."³³ By contrast, this paper opts for one, divinely-inspired text; a holistic "vision" (Ob. 1) that remained integral (aside from copyist errors) with no

²³ This theme of the divine letter also appears in Revelation with Messiah's letter to the seven assemblies (Rev. 2-3).

²⁴ Timmer, *Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, 43.

²⁵ Baker, "Obadiah," 25.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Johan Renkema, *Obadiah*, (Belgium: Peeters, 2003), 25.

²⁹ Emmanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Whole Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 194.

³⁰ Ibid. On the Talmud tractate *Gittin*, Tov wrote: "*B. Git.* 60a forbade the use in the synagogue of separate scrolls of the individual books of the Torah."

³¹ Nogalski, *Joel, Obadiah, Jonah*, 34.

³² Ibid., 36.

³³ Phillips, *Obadiah, Jonah & Micah*, 29.

proof of potential edits like those in narratives.³⁴ Further, Nogalski, may have unintentionally enshrined Obadiah as a potential *canon within the canon*: “Theologically, by reading the Twelve together, the sum of the whole is greater than the individual parts...the macro-structure of the Latter Prophets as a whole into account.”³⁵ While his intention was unclear, the problem with this approach is that Obadiah’s voice would diminish among the Minor Prophets who have their voices. Thus, interpreters should 1) be careful to avoid unintentional homogenization of the Twelve; and 2) pursue an end goal that balances Obadiah’s unique voice within and across the Twelve.

Date

In the fourth century AD, Jerome argued that 1) Obadiah was Hosea’s contemporary³⁶ and 2) Hebrews considered Obadiah the official “under Ahab king of Samaria.”³⁷ Yet, that northern official was neither a prophet nor in Judah for him to see a Jerusalem battle (Ob. 11). Thus, the likelier dates include: 1) Zion’s partial destruction in Jehoram’s time (2 Ch. 21: 8-11); or 2) the late date of Jerusalem’s fall in 587 BC (2 Ch. 36:17-21; Ps. 137:7). This paper chooses the later date soon after the temple destruction in 587 BC (within decades), following scholars who date it then.³⁸ Strzałkowska dates Obadiah before Joel, “which in passage 3:5 seems to quote Obad v. 17.”³⁹ This corroborates the later date. Nogalski also holds to a Babylonian date: “Obadiah admonishes Edom against partnering with Babylon when they are sent by Yahweh to punish Jerusalem.”⁴⁰ By contrast, Sweeney focuses on other disasters apart from Jerusalem’s fall such as: “the Aramean assaults (2 Kgs 6:8–7:20)... and the Aramean siege of Jerusalem (2 Kgs 12:17-18).”⁴¹ Lastly, Phillips adds more confirmation for the later date, “While the historical books do not accuse Edom of participating in the sack of Jerusalem and the temple by the Babylonians in the sixth century, there are allusions, especially in Ezekiel, to Edom’s involvement.”⁴²

³⁴ See the potential scribal edit of *Rameses* in Exodus 1:11, which may have had an earlier name of *Avaris*.

³⁵ Nogalski, *Joel, Obadiah, Jonah*, 36.

³⁶ Jerome, *Three Books of Commentary on the Prophet Hosea To Pammachus*, in Thomas P. Scheck, ed., *Ancient Christian Texts, Commentaries on the Twelve Prophets: Volume 2* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 320.

³⁷ Jerome, “1a. The vision of Obadiah,” in *Commentary on Obadiah*, on Thomas P. Scheck, ed., *Ancient Christian Texts: Commentaries on the Twelve Prophets: Volume 1* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2016), accessed on March 2, 2024.

³⁸ Strzałkowska, “Obadiah in the Septuagint,” 65.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 65-66.

⁴⁰ Nogalski, *Joel, Obadiah, Jonah*, 39.

⁴¹ Sweeney, *Berit Olam*, 298.

⁴² Phillips, *Obadiah, Jonah & Micah*, 26.

Language

Obadiah first wrote his inspired oracle in the Hebrew language, easily understood in its various Canaanite dialects.⁴³ Three centuries later, Septuagint (LXX) writers translated Obadiah (and the rest of the Twelve) for Greek readers. In *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah* (replacing Leslie Allen's commentary), Nogalski notes, "The LXX of the Twelve is generally recognized as a series of translations that began in the third century BCE."⁴⁴ Strzalkowska adds that: "There are some differences between the Hebrew Masoretic (MT) witness of Obadiah, and that of the Greek Septuagint (LXXObad)."⁴⁵ She explains that LXXObad, like other Minor Prophets "remains 'reasonably close to the MT,' it contains... interesting changes that also allow us to understand the way the LXX translator worked."⁴⁶ The LXX witness helps determine the right reading with controversial words such as "saviors" in Ob. 21.

Intertextuality

Obadiah shares critical themes with other OT books. For example, Ps. 2:1-2 has one of the clearest references to *Messiah* or "Anointed One," within the context of "the nations" who are enraged at both YHWH and His *Messiah*. The "nations" figure prominently in Ob. 1, 15-16, and are connected to the Messiah's return on the *day of YHWH*. Chou holds that Psalm 2 is messianic: "...the idealized concepts presented in the psalm point to a messianic ruler. It describes this king's rule."⁴⁷ Obadiah has curse language (imprecations) against Edom that is similar to Psalm 137:7. Stanglin concludes that Psalm 137 is "an imprecatory psalm" due to this curse language.⁴⁸ Jeremiah 49:7-22 contains uncanny similarities with Obadiah against Edom that leaves an impression that one oracle depended on another, or a singular, divinely-inspired source. Sweeney concludes that Obadiah derived features from Jeremiah 49 and some other earlier sources:

⁴³ Edomites, as Isaac's descendants (Gen. 25:19-25), spoke Hebrew and could understand Obadiah's writing, despite a likely accent (see Ephraim's tribal accent in Judg. 12:5-6; and Simon's Galilean accent in Mt. 26:72-3). Hebrew, as well as Canaanite, Phoenician and Punic are Northwest Semitic languages. See "the language of Canaan" in Is. 19:19. Assyrians (Is. 36:11; 2 Ki. 18:26) and Babylonians (Dan. 1:3-4) spoke Hebrew. When Obadiah made copies of his short oracle, papyri would have spread quickly to Israelite survivors—even those who sat and wept "by the rivers of Babylon" (Ps. 137:1-2). A quick disbursement of Obadiah's prophecy out of Judah was thus very likely.

⁴⁴ Nogalski, *Joel, Obadiah, Jonah*, 34.

⁴⁵ Strzalkowska, "Obadiah in the Septuagint," 64.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Chou, *Hermeneutics*, 160.

⁴⁸ Keith D. Stanglin, *The Letter and Spirit of Biblical Interpretation: From the Early Church to Modern Practice*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), xiv.

“Obadiah is indeed dependent upon Jer. 49:7-22, and that the present text of Obadiah is a later reworking of a much earlier oracle.”⁴⁹ This paper cannot address this question fully. Nonetheless, Renkema stresses the importance of Jeremiah for Obadiah: “Any sketch of the prophet Obadiah cannot disregard the extraordinarily close association it has with the prophecy of Jeremiah.”⁵⁰

The book of Joel shows thematic connections to Obadiah, especially in 2:32 for those *saved* on Mount Zion like in Ob. 21. In Joel 2-3, Nogalski concludes that Joel entailed inclusion of biblical texts like Obadiah: “Joel 2:32 (3.5) cites Obadiah 17.”⁵¹ Baker also finds Joel quoting a clause about restoration in Obadiah: “This clause is quoted in Joel 2:32 (3:5) where it is treated as the authoritative Word of God.” This is significant for it confirms the recognition of one canonical book of another as divinely inspired and *authoritative*. Likewise, in Joel 2:32, Thomas Finley concludes, “The statement probably derives from Obad. 17 or possibly Isa. 37:31-32.”⁵² There is undoubtedly an echo of salvation on Zion in Ob. 21. Likewise, Phillips connects Amos to Obadiah on the future hope of restoration: “Amos 9:12 looks ahead to the restoration of the house of David... Obadiah follows logically.”⁵³ Nogalski also sees a connection here, particularly given that Obadiah’s canonical placement “functions as a commentary upon Amos 9:11-12 accentuating the future punishment of Edom on the day of Yahweh.”⁵⁴ This connection thus underpins Amos’ eschatological relevance. In time, Israel would find fulfillment in their promised Messiah.

Lastly, Malachi 1:2-5 confirmed Edom’s destruction in the fifth century BC, for “they are a people against whom YHWH’s fury will rage forever.”⁵⁵ Wielenga concludes that Obadiah’s “anti-Edom rhetoric resonates in Malachi 1:2–4.”⁵⁶ Wielenga sees a misunderstanding about the nation God favored at Jerusalem’s fall: “it looked as if Esau/Edom was the nation favored by God, and not his own people, Jacob/Israel.”⁵⁷ The Midrash *Bereshit Rabbah* quotes Ob. 1:21 in discussing Genesis 33:14, understanding Obadiah’s last verse as a

⁴⁹ Sweeney, *Berit Olam*, 296.

⁵⁰ Renkema, *Obadiah*, 39.

⁵¹ Nogalski, *Joel, Obadiah, Jonah*, 62.

⁵² Thomas J. Finley, *Joel, Amos, Obadiah: An Exegetical Commentary* (Dallas: Biblical Studies Press, 2003), 72.

⁵³ Phillips, *Obadiah, Jonah & Micah*, 26.

⁵⁴ Nogalski, *Joel, Obadiah, Jonah*, 37.

⁵⁵ Phillips, *Obadiah, Jonah & Micah*, 27.

⁵⁶ Wielenga, “The God who hates,” 5.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

message of future justice for Jacob and a condemnation of Edom's crimes.⁵⁸ Thus, Edom's defeat would be a relief to those who suffered.

YHWH's Remnant in Obadiah

God's Faithful Remnant

The first argument for a messianic interpretation of Obadiah is that God's *remnant* in Obadiah applies to the past and future. To properly interpret the *remnant*, a precise canonical approach must prevail. In Obadiah, Baker writes, "Israel's punishment, while great, will be partial in that a remnant will remain."⁵⁹ There is little doubt that in Obadiah's day, a *remnant* survived Jerusalem's downfall. Thus, a right interpretation must define God's *remnant* in time and *across time*. Despite religious misconceptions about whom YHWH first called to covenant salvation, God's faithful *remnant* began in real-time at least a millennium before the Israel nation arrived at Sinai (Ex. 19:1). As a faithful and educated Israelite, Obadiah knew God called his ancestor Abram by Ur (Heb. 11:8). Abraham's family (Gen. 12:1-2) became the faithful *remnant* for YHWH. In Obadiah's time, this community looked to God's "holy temple" (Jonah 2:5; Ps. 73:17). They had great expectations for a seed (Gen. 13:15, Gal. 3:15-16) greater than the Serpent to come and crush its head (Gen. 3:15).⁶⁰

Because Obadiah wrote about "the sons of Judah" (v. 12) and "the house of Jacob" (vv. 17-8), he affirms that God gave Israel a covenant for theocracy and relationship (Ex. 19:5). YHWH declared, "I will take you as My people, and I will be your God" (Ex. 6:7). The Godhead always had a historical plan to "dwell among the sons of Israel and...be their God." (Ex. 29:45). Timmer offers valuable insight on this point: "Obadiah's message thus encourages the faithful... while warning the wicked (whether Israelite or not) to repent before the Day of YHWH falls upon them."⁶¹ This is a fair conclusion from Obadiah's text. The wicked

⁵⁸ *Bereshit Rabbah*, 78:12, "Bereshit Rabbah 78:13," (Sefaria, 2024), https://www.sefaria.org/Bereshit_Rabbah.78.12, accessed March 1, 2024. The text reads: "Rabbi Abbahu said: We reviewed the entire Bible and did not find that Jacob ever went to Esau at Mount Seir. Is it possible that Jacob, [who] was truthful, [nevertheless] deceived him? When, then, did he go to him? In the future. That is what is written: 'Saviors will ascend Mount Zion to judge the mountain of Esau' (Obadiah 1:21)."

⁵⁹ Baker, "Obadiah," 37.

⁶⁰ Before Israelites and Edomites, ancient Gentiles were the first to believe in YHWH. Adam and Eve, by faith, put on skins that YHWH provided (Gen. 3). Their son Abel, by faith, offered "God a better sacrifice" (Heb. 11:4). His relatives, by faith, "called upon the name of the LORD" (Gen. 4:26). Like Obadiah, Enoch prophesied about the day of YHWH (Jude 1:14b). Noah "in reverence prepared the ark" (Heb. 11:7) and, by faith, boarded it (Gen. 7:13). Abram, a non-Israelite, like Sarah and Lot, believed God (Gen. 15:6). These and others were all a *remnant*.

⁶¹ Timmer, *Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, 38.

were not just among the Gentiles. There were wicked Israelites like Ahab, Manasseh, King Zedekiah, and countless others who rejected the prophets both before and after Babylonian exile. The *remnant* in Obadiah's day were those Israelite survivors who suffered destruction and exile at Babylon's hands as well as Edom's treachery. Yet despite these disasters, they still believed in YHWH. These were the faithful community. Baker identifies those who believed in YHWH's future hope with the *saviors* of Ob. 21 whom he described as either: "*deliverers*, or those who bring an expected or future salvation (cf. Neh. 9:27)."⁶² Thus, Baker leaves open the possibility that these human *saviors* were not rescuing others—but securing their salvation on Zion's hill. This is exactly what Messiah's *remnant* does today by believing in the Messiah who will return.

Apocalyptic Enmity: Jacob and Esau

The second argument for a messianic hermeneutic in Obadiah is the recognition that Edom and Israel's struggles went beyond the patriarchs and into the far future. Despite covenantal brothers from Isaac, these two nations fought an internecine struggle throughout history. Phillips confirms there is more than just a literal sense in this fight: "there is powerful symbolism in Edom as representative of enemies of YHWH."⁶³ This speaks to a symbolic nature in Obadiah that goes beyond the text's surface level. Baker corroborates this insight by stressing from Obadiah 21 that "Edom is the paradigm of all the nations."⁶⁴ This paper affirms this historical enmity that in Obadiah symbolically transitions to apocalyptic judgment, from the ancient past to distant eschatological future.

Historical Enmity

Though Esau and Jacob had made amends (Gen. 33:4-11) and even attended their father Isaac's funeral (Gen. 35:29), Edom did not consistently have good relations with Israel.⁶⁵ Phillips saw in Isaac's prophecy, i.e. living "by your sword" (Gen. 27:40), an initial sign of enmity: "Isaac's words to Esau set the trajectory for the ongoing relationship."⁶⁶ Edomites adopted Esau's second name *Edom*, meaning "red" or "ruddy" (Gen. 25:30). Niehaus found wordplay in Obadiah's use of *Edom* from Gen. 25: "The word 'red' in Hebrew is *adom*, used in

⁶² Baker, "Obadiah," 48.

⁶³ Phillips, *Obadiah, Jonah & Micah*, 32.

⁶⁴ Baker, "Obadiah," 43.

⁶⁵ For evidence of Edom's hostility see Num. 20:20; 1 Sam. 14:47; Ps. 60:1; 2 Chronicles 21:8.

⁶⁶ Phillips, *Obadiah, Jonah & Micah*, 26.

a play on Edom's name in verse 30.”⁶⁷ Timmer thought Edom came from the color of “red-soiled region where he settled (Gen. 32:3) and to his descendants (Gen. 36).”⁶⁸ Depending on the context, *Edom* (עֲדוֹם) could mean “ruby,” “ground,” or “mankind.” In Obadiah, a phonemic connection appears between *Edom* and *Adam*, the progenitor of *humanity*. Adam gave rise to the *nations*. To Hebrews, “Edom sounds like *ādām*.”⁶⁹ *Edom/Adam* had the same spelling (עֲדוֹם) prior to Masoretic vowel points. Thus, in the name of humanity’s founder *Adam*, there was likely a phonemic and eschatological link between *Edom* in Ob. 1 and the *nations* in vv. 15 and 16.

Covenant Brotherhood

Before Jerusalem fell in 587 BC, Israel and Edom still had covenant brotherhood despite their troubled past.⁷⁰ While Jacob alone received the family birthright and the gospel promise (Gen. 27:28-29),⁷¹ this did not create Esau’s total separation from YHWH, the God of Isaac. Though Paul discussed God’s total disgust with “Esau” in Romans 9, that difficult passage requires lengthy discussion and interpretation. Simply put, Scriptural evidence does not support a destruction for all of Esau’s descendants. Esau’s sins simply did not apply to the individual destinies of Esau’s surviving children (Ez. 18:20).

There is proof that a covenant bond did exist, as follows: 1) Esau did not publicly revile YHWH despite Esau’s godlessness (Gen. 25:32; Heb. 12:16); 2) Esau tearfully regretted giving up his birthright (Heb. 12:17); 3) Esau’s progeny learned to value wisdom (Ob. 8);⁷² 4) Edomites did not turn to idols right away;⁷³ and 5) Moses still addressed Edom as his “brother” after centuries in Egypt (Num. 14:20). Niehaus emphasizes the importance of this covenant: “The covenantal

⁶⁷ Jeffrey Niehaus, “Obadiah,” in Thomas E. McComiskey, ed., in *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary, vol. 2: Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, and Habakkuk* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018), 495.

⁶⁸ Timmer, *Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, 39.

⁶⁹ Phillips, *Obadiah, Jonah & Micah*, 33.

⁷⁰ Deborah the prophetess sang joyously that YHWH had “marched from the land of Edom.” (Judg. 5:4).

⁷¹ Jacob received the gospel promise through Isaac, who like Messiah, was Abraham’s promised seed (Gal. 3:19).

⁷² Yigal Levin, “The Religion of Idumea and Its Relationship to Early Judaism,” *Religions* 11 (2020): 504. Levin here cited Ob. 8. There were clay bowls at Mareshah bearing wisdom texts. These “reminded [him] that some biblical traditions see Edom as a source of wisdom (Jer. 49:7; Obad. 8).” See also the wisdom discourses of Job’s friend Eliphaz the Temanite (Job 2:11; 3:1-21).

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 496. Levin here confirmed the likelihood that Edom originally worshiped YHWH based on ancient texts which: “led many scholars to conclude that the Edomites were originally worshipers of Yahweh.”

background plays a major role in the Book of Obadiah."⁷⁴ Further, God did not yet intend destruction for Edom. Citing Dt. 2:2-6, Niehaus stressed "Yahweh's protection of the Edomites is apparent also in his refusal to allow the Israelites to occupy their territory."⁷⁵ This conclusion was correct. God spared Edom for a thousand years in a secure homeland—until they betrayed their brother Jacob. In Obadiah, Wielenga sees more than internecine struggle between nations: "The betrayal by Esau/Edom was not just a break-up in kinship relations...it was a treaty betrayal, a stab in the back by a political partner who, they thought, could be trusted."⁷⁶

A Broken Treaty

Sweeney explains wine drinking in Ob. 16 as proof of a treaty before Jerusalem's fall: "Obadiah apparently refers to Edom's treaty with Israel/Jerusalem...with such feasting and drinking on Mount Zion."⁷⁷ Edom and Judah shared borders. Pursuing a treaty was not only wise but necessary. Timmer highlights close neighbors with cultural ties: "This general proximity echoes more formal alliances of 'brotherhood'...between second-millennium kings and...smaller states."⁷⁸ This treaty made Edom's later betrayal of Judah all the more painful. This is clear in Obadiah's bold accusation in v.11: "You too were as one of them!" Edom acted no differently than foreigners. Timmer confirms this link to Babylon: "[Obadiah] compares the Edomites to the Babylonians, who had neither trade nor blood ties with Judah."⁷⁹ While commercial, cultural and genetic ties between them made this betrayal a crime, it was Edom's hatred of God's covenant by Jacob that made it infamous. Wielenga writes, "The point of no return in this relationship between God and Esau/Edom came with their betrayal of Jacob/Israel."⁸⁰ Strife after this point continued for centuries. Strzałkowska verifies this symbol: "The Edomites would become in the Greek translation of the book not only a symbol of an enemy from the past, but an image of all Israel's current enemies.... LXXObad will rename 'דִּדְעָ' to 'Idumea' (Ἰδομαία)."⁸¹ Edom was a symbol indeed, both as Jacob's brother, and as all of his enemies.

⁷⁴ Jeffrey Niehaus, "Obadiah," 496.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Bob Wielenga, "The God who hates: The significance of Esau/Edom in the postexilic prophetic eschatology according to Malachi 1:2–5 with a systematic theological postscript," *In Die Skriflig* (Mar 2022): 5.

⁷⁷ Sweeney, *Berit Olam*, 307.

⁷⁸ Timmer, *Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, 40.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Wielenga, "The God who hates," 5.

⁸¹ Strzałkowska, "Obadiah in the Septuagint," 72.

Theological Enmity

Are all Edomites cursed? God graciously blessed Edom with land in Canaan while Israel had to go to Egypt (Gen. 33:16; 36:8; Deut. 2:8, 12).⁸² This is consistent with God's kindness to other nations, whom He never required to keep Israel's theocracy. On Ob. 1, Norman Geisler stresses that God never required Gentiles to keep Sabbath or circumcision or make "offering sacrifices in the Jerusalem temple."⁸³ Yigal Levin offers evidence that Edom, to some degree, kept circumcision.⁸⁴ Also, Amos 9:11-12 mentions "the remnant of Edom" whom Israel will subdue. This does not describe eternal slavery. Timmer correctly concludes that God will eternally restore Edomites on the day of YHWH (Ob. 21): "The context leaves little doubt that the Edomites who reside in this place have survived the Day of YHWH against the nations (contrast those who did not, in v. 18) and are now members of YHWH's kingdom (cf. Amos 9:11-12)."⁸⁵ Even a rabbinic tradition in the Talmud (*Avodah Zorah* 10b) understood rightly that not all Edomites would face destruction.⁸⁶

The Day of YHWH

The third argument for a messianic view of Obadiah is that the *day of YHWH* can only belong to one person: the Messiah Jesus. Phillips sees a greater fulfillment in Obadiah for the "kingdom of YHWH's...[f]rom the post-resurrection perspective, that points to the anointed King, Jesus Christ, the Lord of heaven and earth... (Isa. 45:23-25...)"⁸⁷ Some scholars have hurriedly characterized Obadiah's book as deficient in its theology, even if only in its rhetoric. Allen once wrote, with an apparent bias, "Essentially, it is lopsided and hardly a presentation of God's whole counsel, even by OT standards."⁸⁸ The evidence, however, indicates something far less deficient in all the rich language and deep theological symbolism. Obadiah is a small marvel of prophetic literature.

⁸² Wielenga, "The God who hates," 5.

⁸³ Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2011), 1200.

⁸⁴ Yigal Levin, "The Religion of Idumea," 502. Levin held here that Edomites (later Idumeans), to some degree, held to the practice of circumcision based on biblical data (Jer. 9:24-25) and that a Hellenistic-Egyptian writer of the mid-third century B.C. "pointed out that slave boys purchased at Mareshah could be identified by the fact that they were circumcised."

⁸⁵ Timmer, *Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, 57.

⁸⁶ *Avodah Zorah*, 10b:8, Ch.10, "Avodah Zorah 10b:8," (Sefaria, 2024), https://www.sefaria.org/Avodah_Zarah.10b.8?lang=bi, accessed on March 1, 2024.

⁸⁷ Phillips, *Obadiah, Jonah & Micah*, 33.

⁸⁸ Leslie C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 137.

On Ob. 15, Sweeney writes that the fuller phrase, “‘the Day of YHWH is near (qārôb) against all the nations,’ is a stereotypical example of the language employed for the “Day of YHWH” tradition.”⁸⁹ Sweeney is right that the wording is typical, but it was more than just tradition. Nogalski holds that Edom’s actions on Israel’s day of *distress* and *calamity* were eschatological triggers that set the day of YHWH into motion: “Edom’s action shall then initiate a day of Yahweh against all the nations... (Obad 15, 16-21).”⁹⁰ This was not the first time YHWH used cities or nations as metaphors for judgment.⁹¹ Likewise, Finley concludes that what “Obadiah says about Edom applies equally to any nation that sets itself against the Lord and His people.”⁹² 600 years later, the Israelite Paul explained to new Christians that this day of Judgment was coming, “for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire” (1 Cor. 3:14).

In sum, the *day of YHWH* is a well-known expectation in the OT in which God Himself comes to the nations for judgment and retribution. If the Messiah is indeed the Son of God then there is only one logical position that works: Jesus Messiah is the *YHWH* who will visibly and gloriously come to the earth on that last and final day. Using the position of apocalyptic purpose, this paper proceeds with a messianic theology in Obadiah consistent with such OT expectations.

The Messianic Hermeneutic

In addition to the above arguments for a messianic interpretation in Obadiah, this paper also presents a rationale for a messianic hermeneutic. These arguments confirm the theological unity of both Obadiah and the entire biblical canon. Yet, this messianic approach meets strong opposition among scholars. For example, Darian Lockett wrote that a *salvation-historical* approach is not only “limiting one’s biblical theology... [but also] risks flattening the relationship between the two testaments and missing Scripture’s theological subject matter.”⁹³ Lockett wrote against the *salvation-historical* key critiquing D. A. Carson with Karl Barth’s criticisms. This key in Lockett is identical to this paper’s messianic lens; for salvation history is clearly *in re* Messiah. Regrettably, Lockett’s position reduces Obadiah to a reader’s experience—not the divine authority of Scripture over humanity.

Likewise, scholars like Nogalski reject the primacy of messianic unity across the canon, including Obadiah: “Unfortunately, many... have perpetuated a

⁸⁹ Sweeney, *Berit Olam*, 306.

⁹⁰ Nogalski, *Joel, Obadiah, Jonah*, 74.

⁹¹ The Messiah warned towns that rejected His followers (Matt. 10:15).

⁹² Finley, *Joel, Amos, Obadiah*, 309.

⁹³ Darian Lockett, “Limitations of a Purely Salvation-Historical Approach to Biblical Theology,” *Horizons in biblical theology*. 39, no. 2 (2017): 211.

view that the primary purpose of the prophets was to foretell the coming of the Messiah.”⁹⁴ Nogalski asserts that Messiah rarely appeared in the OT and, that, when it does appear, it is “related primarily to royal figures.”⁹⁵ Yet, his plural “majesties” contradict Daniel 9:25’s singular “prince”. Certainly, the Hebrew title *Meshiach* (משיח) was not ubiquitous. But that does not convincingly negate the theological witness of the divine king known as *Messiah*. Nogalski still insists, “it is no wonder that Jesus spends a good deal of time clarifying that his role as Messiah is not defined by these political expectations.”⁹⁶

Some scholars simply do not see messianic judgment in Obadiah but rather 1) territorial restoration of the Israelite territory and/or 2) a humanistic message of reconciliation related to a *Messiah*—but not the *Messiah* the prophets promised. First, Nogalski excludes from Obadiah any Davidic kingship, opting only for literal, territorial repossession: “nothing in this text describes a monarch or a Davidic representative.”⁹⁷ Second, Nogalski insists that Christians should oppose Obadiah’s *lex talionis* (retribution): “Obadiah’s justice can only produce recompense by tallying the latest wrong and responding in kind... Christians are called to practice the law of love.”⁹⁸ Nogalski cites Colossians to promote a post-Obadiah view of justice,⁹⁹ concluding that “Obadiah could not imagine justice without punishment.”¹⁰⁰ However, his position neither matches 1) a historical understanding of OT theology; nor, as expected, 2) a messianic interpretation. It exchanges the true meaning of God’s justice for bare humanism, while also doubting Obadiah’s good morals.

A sound interpretation of Obadiah uses a messianic model that adequately transitions Israel’s theocratic past into the world’s apocalyptic future. Only the divine Restorer of Israel’s *remnant* can bring justice to both Edomites in the past and enraged nations in the future. Phillips astutely interprets Obadiah’s eschatological promise as completed only in Israel’s Messiah: “In Jesus, God incarnate, all promises of and hopes for justice are completely fulfilled.”¹⁰¹ Other positions limit the scope of Obadiah’s prophecy to only a literal, Davidic kingdom separate from the “new heavens and new earth” (Is. 66:22). Phillips anticipates such objections and concludes that “Zion as a restored place of refuge means that the audience will need to see beyond their current perceptions of Zion.”¹⁰² On the concept of refugees within the nations in Obadiah, Finley adds, “When Christ

⁹⁴ James D. Nogalski, *Interpreting Prophetic Literature*, 69.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 286.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ Phillips, *Obadiah, Jonah & Micah*, 33.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 49-50.

returns, however, only those from the nations who have called on the Lord's name will enter."¹⁰³

On the Bible's theological unity, Osborne stresses that interpreters "must consider several levels: the passage, the theology of the writer and the theology of Scripture."¹⁰⁴ Without this standard of theological unity, the messianic interpretation falls, but so too do other paradigms trying to only understand biblical books in its niches. Notably, Osborne cites *šālīah* as a major concept in John's Gospel: "One of the major Christological emphases in the Fourth Gospel is that of Jesus as the 'sent one,' ...the Jewish idea of the *šālīah*, the 'representative.'"¹⁰⁵ A *sent one* appears in Obadiah 1 by *šīr* (צִיר) or *messenger* who, in the divine passive, is *sent* or *šullāh* (שָׁלַח) to the nations. This *sent one* may be the same as in John's Gospel. Osborne added about *šālīah*: "This theology of the '*shaliach*' or 'sent one' is developed fully... as part of the 'chain of revelation.'"¹⁰⁶ In Obadiah, a *sent one* brings judgment first to Edom (v.1) and then all nations (v.15). Also, *šullāh* in Ob. 1 is significant in the divine passive, pushing prophecy into motion. Phillips confirms that "*šl* ('send') is a technical term for YHWH's commissioning prophets."¹⁰⁷ Ultimately, the messenger God *sent* was likely the revealed messenger of YHWH in the canon: the Messiah of Psalm 2 and John's Gospel.

Concerning those who abused YHWH's people in Obadiah, Phillips points out a link between them and "modern-day Edoms' wreaking havoc in the lives of God's people."¹⁰⁸ This point accurately interprets the Edom as indicating, in some sense, as modern persecutors. Timmer quotes Romans and Hebrews to unpack Obadiah's meaning of the *day of YHWH*: "YHWH's reign is fully established over his purified and multi-ethnic people (Rom. 2:28–29), who inherit, as Abraham's seed, the kingdom that cannot be shaken (Heb. 11:10; 12:28)."¹⁰⁹ Timmer could have written more about Obadiah's implication for Jesus Messiah, opting to avoid a fuller look. Yet, he still insightfully shows that this King had to be more than a mere man: "YHWH's kingship realizes the hope... for a king who could guide Israel in covenant obedience even as it transcends the hope for a merely human Davidide to rule YHWH's kingdom."¹¹⁰ These waiting for the *day of YHWH* are Messiah's people, both Israelite and Gentile believers.

¹⁰³ Finley, *Joel, Amos, Obadiah*, 327.

¹⁰⁴ Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 452.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 437.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 439.

¹⁰⁷ Phillips, *Obadiah, Jonah & Micah*, 35.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁰⁹ Timmer, *Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, 57.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

A Messianic Interpretation of Obadiah

After the fall of Jerusalem, Obadiah saw and heard a vision in Judah from YHWH, who was God's Son, "the Word" (John 1:1), the divine *Logos* ("Word") who gave His revelation to John (Rev. 1:1-3). As an Israelite prophet, Obadiah studied the divine Scriptures. He certainly heard about Jeremiah and Baruch in Jerusalem. Like other believing Israelites, Obadiah waited for the Messiah's coming (the *Anointed One* of Ps. 2; the *Adonai* of Ps. 110; the *Suffering Servant* of Isaiah 53) to rescue God's *remnant* forever. Obadiah's vision came at a tragic time for God's people. Babylon destroyed the temple, sending most Israelites into exile. Others fled to Egypt in rebellion. Edom allied with other nations and violently betrayed Judah. YHWH likely "sent" (*šullāh*; שְׁלַח) the Messiah, or another "messenger" (*sir*; צִיר), to the nations bringing God's "report" (*semuah*; שְׂמוּעָה). In the fullness of time, the Messiah testified the Father *sent* the Son (John 6:57; 8:29; 20:21) and *gave* the Son so that all may believe in Him (John 3:16; 1 John 2:1-2; 1 Tim. 1:15). These nations, at first, were Edom's allies who later betrayed the Edomites. They also symbolized the nations on the "day of YHWH" in Ob. 15. YHWH called for a battle against Edom, and in the future, all who are hostile to God and His *remnant* on the final day.

Verses 2-9

Speaking directly to the nation, YHWH issued His real judgment on Edom for the atrocity of betraying his covenant brother "Jacob" (v.10). God intended for surviving Israel (as well as Edom) to hear His divine announcement of justice and instruction. The Edomites had likely made a recent peace treaty with Israel that they soon abandoned. They took advantage of Babylon's devastating attack on Judah and broke their oaths. These verses show God's commitment to justice in blotting out all evil and especially repaying those who abuse His people. This justice will arrive when Messiah returns with fire on the last day (2 Th. 1:7-9). That same Messiah condemned Edomites for their "arrogance" (v. 3); their trust "in the clefts of the rock" (v. 3): their so-called "wise men" (v. 8), and their violence (v. 10).

Verses 10-14

This next section enlarges YHWH's judgment from a temporal focus to one in the far future. The Messiah will destroy Edom "forever" (v. 10); not just in the sixth century BC context, but in eternal judgment. While historical Edom is still in mind, the nation transitions into an apocalyptic symbol predicting the full

defeat of God's enemies. This apocalyptic type of prophetic transition is well known in Scripture.¹¹¹ Likewise, Messiah's words to Edom of "shame will cover you" echo the reality of the Hebrew underworld Sheol.¹¹² In a searing indictment, YHWH charged Edom with "violence," (v. 10) and that he "stood aloof" (v. 11); and like the Gentiles attacking Jerusalem they "were as one of them" (v. 11). With purpose, God described Esau's horrific act when, as Gentile soldiers "cast lots for Jerusalem" (v.11), Edomites callously watched.¹¹³ Notably, the Messiah's charges against Edom/nations now switch here from descriptive accusations to imperative commands: "Do not..." (vv. 12-14). Sometimes prophets used "the so-called prophetic perfect"¹¹⁴ verbs to indicate a future time. Because Jerusalem already fell, these were future prohibitions warning the nations not to abuse God's *remnant*. Certainly, all persecuting nations will face their own "time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation" (Dan. 12:1b). The Messiah called this a "distress for the nations" (Luke 21:25); when "all the tribes of the earth will mourn" (Matt. 24:29) at His return.

Verses 15-16

These verses are YHWH's "deliberate transition between"¹¹⁵ one section in the ancient past and the next into the far future. The words reiterate judgment—now on "a wider scale, [when] there will be a 'day' [for] all nations (v. 15) in either judgment or deliverance."¹¹⁶ This is "the day of YHWH," when Messiah (*Christos*; see *Χριστος* in LXX Ps. 2:1; 28:8)¹¹⁷ returns in power to confront "all the nations" (v. 15) who will "defeat chaos and the powers of opposition to himself."¹¹⁸ Paul described this day as "the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (Rom. 2:5). Köstenberger offered an important concept for interpretation: "Paul associated Jesus' coming with the Day of the Lord...expresses a high Christology."¹¹⁹

¹¹¹ See Daniel 11:29-45, where the messenger announces an oracle that begins with foreshadowing the Seleucid Antiochus IV (second century BC) but then transitions to a future "King of North."

¹¹² See Sheol in Job 26:6 and Is. 14:9. This was a foreshadowing of the final form of hell: a fiery location where "the worm will not die and the fire will not be quenched (Is. 66:24; Mk. 9:48).

¹¹³ Six centuries later, the Messiah would endure tribulation outside Jerusalem. There Gentile soldiers crucified Him and "cast lots for my clothing" (John 19:24), fulfilling David's prediction (Ps. 22:18).

¹¹⁴ Phillips, *Obadiah*, 30.

¹¹⁵ Baker, "Obadiah," 25. See the discussion above on form and structure.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Rahlfs, Vol. 2, 2.

¹¹⁸ Baker, "Obadiah," 42.

¹¹⁹ Andreas J. Köstenberger, et al., *The Cradle, The Cross and The Crown: An Introduction To The New Testament* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2016), 530.

Verses 17-21

This section concludes the book with more vivid, apocalyptic images involving God's restored *remnant* in Zion through Messiah Jesus. John Calvin instructed readers to observe here in Obadiah: "that God himself really rules in the person of Christ."¹²⁰ This confirms that Edomites were not the only audience, but also: "Judah, greatly in need of assurance... clearly a significant intended audience."¹²¹ The *remnant* are all the saved people in *Christos* on the *day of YHWH*. Michael Shepherd linked this apocalyptic text with the people and nations going to Zion in Micah 4:1-2, calling them "the children of Abraham by faith (Gen. 17:5, 6, 16; 35:11; Rom. 4:11)...of the inclusion of the nations in God's kingdom."¹²² Shepherd was correct to see in Micah and the Twelve a fulfillment of salvation for all peoples. Regarding the plural participle "saviors" (*mousaim*; מְשַׁעֲמִים) in v. 21,¹²³ Calvin kept this term in the [active] voice: "they who will judge."¹²⁴ One LXX reads *anasozomenoi* (ἀνασωζόμενοι).¹²⁵ Both LXX Jer. 51:50 and LXX Ez. 7:16 use *anasozomenoi* to translate noun forms of *palat* (פָּלַט; "to escape").¹²⁶

Remarkably, Ob. 14 also used a noun form of פָּלַט to describe Israelite "refugees." Thus, interpreters should consider using terms like "rescued ones," or "survivors" due to: 1) the LXX textual witness;¹²⁷ 2) Scriptural unity on God

¹²⁰ John Calvin, *Commentary on Joel, Amos, Obadiah* (Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2024), 453.

¹²¹ Phillips, *Obadiah, Jonah & Micah*, 25.

¹²² Michael Shepherd, *A Commentary on the Book of the Twelve* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2018), 255.

¹²³ "Strong's Hebrew 3467," *Strong's Concordance* (Bible Hub, 2024),

<https://biblehub.com/hebrew/3467.htm>, accessed on March 2, 2024. Strong's lists מְשַׁעֲמִים as a form of *yasha* יָשַׁע "to deliver." Thus, *mousaim* (מְשַׁעֲמִים) in v. 21 is the plural participle from the verb "to save." In the active, *mousaim* likely meant "ones saving" or "saviors." This indicates the original voice was passive. Ultimately, YHWH's role as *Judge* and *Rescuer* in Obadiah, as well as canonical unity that the *remnant* never called themselves *saviors*, makes the passive a superior choice for *mousaim*.

¹²⁴ John Calvin, *Commentary on Joel, Amos, Obadiah* (Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2024), 453.

¹²⁵ Rahlfs, *Septuaginta*, Vol. 2, 526. Another reading has *sesomenoi* (σεσωσμενοι) with a similar meaning.

¹²⁶ John Barton, *Joel and Obadiah* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 2001), 154. Barton wrote: "MT has 'saviors' (*mosā'im*, doubly defective), and this is defended by Coggins and Ben Zvi, but most commentators, with BHS, emend to a passive: *mūsā'im*, "those who are saved"; though since the people referred to are going up to "rule" Mount Esau, one could think of them as the leaders (and therefore "saviors") of the restored Israel."

¹²⁷ In Rahlfs's LXX Ob. 21, ἀνασωζόμενοι is in the present tense, with middle/passive voice, not active. The passive "ones being saved up" reads better than the middle: "saving themselves up."

saving a *remnant*—not a *remnant* saving themselves in Obadiah or elsewhere; and 3) scholars affirm the passive voice.¹²⁸ However, most English Bibles choose “saviors.” Regardless of this one translation issue, Phillips ably concluded that the concepts of saving and judging in *saviors*: “merge here with the rich connotations of deliverance and justice.”¹²⁹ On this note, most scholars can agree on the power of Obadiah’s themes to bring redemption to God’s *remnant* and final justice to the nations.

Conclusion

Obadiah’s book is a prophetic masterpiece. Through the messianic hermeneutic and the Bible’s theological unity, Obadiah reveals much about the divine Messiah and the *remnant* whom He will rescue on the apocalyptic *day of YHWH*. This book provides messianic context and eschatological predictions to better understand the Scriptures, including the NT. Chou provides here a parting thought that the OT still “provides the framework, purposes, language and ideas that the New Testament will appropriately apply in light of a new era in Christ.”¹³⁰

Luke 13:23 uses σωζόμενοι or “ones being saved.” The LXX translators chose the passive voice Rahlfs’s LXX Ob. 21 reads: “και αναβήσονται ανασωζόμενοι εξ όρους Σιών”, meaning “and will ascend those being saved out from Mount Zion.”

¹²⁸ “Strong’s Hebrew 6403,” *Strong’s Concordance* (Bible Hub, 2024), <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/6403.htm>, accessed on March 2, 2024.

¹²⁹ Phillips, *Obadiah, Jonah & Micah*, 52.

¹³⁰ Chou, *Hermeneutics*, 197.

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