I. AUTHORSHIP

A. The name “Obadiah,” means “servant (or worshiper) of the LORD.”
   1. This is a common name, 1 Kgs 18:3-16; 1 Ch 3:21; 7:3; 8:38; 9:16; 12:9; 27:19; 2 Chron 17:7; 34:12; Ezra 8:9; Ne 10:5; 12:25.
   2. Some have suggested that the name is symbolic.
   3. “A tradition in the Babylonian Talmud (Sanhedrin 39b), known to Jerome, identified the author with Ahab’s steward (1 Kgs 18:3-16), but there is no evidence for identifying the author with this, or any of the other Hebrew Bible “Obadihas.”

B. Some have thought the author a cult prophet attached to the Jerusalem temple
   1. Its oracle against Edom, a foreign nation, is a common subject of prophets.
   2. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Amos contain oracles against Edom.
   3. “An oracle against a foreign nation is not necessarily cultic. But the overall composition, in which the basic reasoned judgment progresses to Edom’s inclusion in a wider judgment and to coming vindication and blessing for the people of God, may have been designed to use at temple services” (Allen, 136)

C. The motif of Yhwh’s kingship, v. 21, is similar to “enthronement” psalms (47, 93, 96-99).
   1. These are most often associated with the New Year Festival and the theme of Yhwh’s judgment of the nations.
   2. But the historical emphasis of 1, and 11-16 argues against such a liturgical composition.
   3. “The piece evidently arose out of a concrete political situation of widespread Edomite agitation (v. 1),” which Obadiah used and combined with traditional and cultic themes to develop his prophecy (Allen, 136-7).

II. DATE AND PLACE OF WRITING

A. The date and place have long been disputed, Jerome being the first to observe the difficulties of the book.
1. Complicating the matter is that various problems are interrelated.

2. For example,

The chronological discussion to a certain extent runs on a parallel course to that concerning the dating of Joel. As with Joel, one factor is the significance of the canonical position of the book as the fourth of the Minor Prophets. If on other grounds Obadiah is not to be placed early, it is possible to regard its position after Amos as a thematic sequence: the book may have been vied as a virtual commentary on Amos 9:12 (Allen, 129).

B. Dating the prophecy is mainly a matter of relating vv. 11-14 to one of two specific events in Israel's history:

1. **The invasion of Jerusalem by Philistines and Arabs** during the reign of Jehoram (853-841 B.C.), see 2 Kgs 8:20-22; 2 Chron 21:8-20, would make Obadiah a contemporary of Elisha.
   
a. Keil, von Orellli, and Young represent those of this persuasion.

b. These appeal to this attack and relate it to the revolt of Edom in Jehoram’s reign (2 Chron 21:8-10).

c. “But it is questionable whether an attack on Jerusalem is envisaged in 2 Chr. 21, and certainly the Edomites are not mentioned in connection with it” (Allen, 129).

2. **The Babylonian attacks on Jerusalem (605-586)**, would make Obadiah a contemporary of Jeremiah and seems more likely.

a. The vivid details seem to indicate that the author was an eyewitness of the 587 tragedy.

b. Vv. 2-9 seem to look forward to a future defeat.

c. Historical data seem to indicate that the Edomites “... were still in control of their native land until after 550 B.C. However, by the fifth century Arab names had appeared at Ezion-geber” (Allen, 131).

d. The parallels between Ob 1-9 and Jer 49:7-22 have caused many to suggest some kind of interdependence between Obadiah and Jeremiah, but it may be that both prophets were drawing on a common source not otherwise known to us, thus indicating a date at the beginning of the Exile.
III. COMPOSITION AND THEME

A. Composition: Apart from the question of an older oracle in 1-9, there are three major views regarding stages of composition.

1. Wellhausen, Bewer, Pfeiffer, Eissfeldt, Myers, Deissler, and Keller attributes 1-14, 15b to Obadiah and the rest to a later hand.
   a. The different theme of 15a and 16-21, thus different authors.
      (1) The first part deals with concrete situations such as the fall of Jerusalem and the impending conquest of Edom.
      (2) The second part is eschatological dealing with the Day of Yahweh and the destruction of all nations but Judah.
   b. Each of the above scholars offer their own peculiar slant to this theory.

2. Von Orelli, Rudolph, Weiser, Fohrer, and Brockington argue that only 19-21 did not originate with Obadiah
   a. Rudolph and Weiser “distinguish authorship from continuity, regarding vv. 15a, 16-18 as an independent oracle of Obadiah, thus ascribing both parts to Obaidah” (Allen, 134).
   b. Fohrer splits vv. 1-18 into independent, nonconsecutive units to be assigned to Obadiah, finding five separate, self-contained sayings and arguing that 19-21 are a typical eschatological addition.
   c. Brockington claims continuity for 1-18, compares the book to Joel for development of thought
      (1) “. . . in both cases a contemporary situation is seen as a token of the coming of the day of Yahweh, and as soon as this latter theme is introduced it naturally brings in its train a worldwide eschatological event” (Allen, 134)
      (2) 19-21 are a prose appendix to the foregoing.

3. Thompson “ascribes the whole book to Obadiah,” “follows older commentators such as Keil and van Hoonacker . . . , [and] in favor of its literary unity he notes . . . that many prophets combine historical and eschatological elements” (Allen, 134).
b. There is a natural development from the forecast of Edom’s downfall to a delineation of crimes on Judah’s Day, to the wider theme of the nations’ Day of doom and the rehabilitation of God’s people.

B. Theme: Edom is proud over her own security and has rejoiced exulted over Israel's devastation by foreign powers.

1. Edom's participation in that disaster will bring on God's wrath.

2. She herself will be destroyed, but Mount Zion and Israel will be delivered, and God's kingdom will triumph.

3. Edom's hostile activities have spanned the centuries of Israel's existence.
   a. The following Biblical references are helpful in understanding the relation of Israel and Edom: Gen 27:41-45; 32:1-21; 33-36; Exod 15:15; Num 20:14-21; Deut 2:1-6; 23:7; 1 Sam 21 with Ps 52; 2 Sam 8:13-14; 2 Kgs 8:20-22; 14:7; Ps 83; Ezek 35; Joel 3:18-19; Am 1:11-12; 9:12.
   b. Since the Edomites are related to the Israelites (v. 10), their hostility is all the more reprehensible.
   c. Edom is fully responsible for her failure to assist Israel and for her open aggression.
   d. The fact that God rejected Esau (Gen 25:23; Mal 1:3; Ro 9:13) in no way exonerates the Edomites.

4. Edom, smug in its mountain strongholds, will be dislodged and sacked. Israel will prosper because God is with her.

5. “To a people still smarting from the 587 B.C. catastrophe and, though restored to the land, few in number and confined to a pitiable fragment and hemmed in by foreign squatters on territory traditionally their own, Obadiah brings the divine assurance that Yahweh has not forgotten their plight and will intervene to redress the situation” (Allen, 135-6)

IV. THEOLOGY: Theological emphases grow out of the historical setting of the book.

A. In the early exile, the nation was struggling to understand “Why?!"
B. Obadiah was a balm for past hurts.

C. “He soothes festering mental sores which developed from national humiliation, and yet he lifts the issues to a higher plan than mere resentment and revenge” (Allen, 138)

D. Compensatory judgement is promised

E. Obadiah addresses the concept of “the Day of Yhwh” as a day that is “near” (v. 15), which is more than vengeance, for it is the protest of outraged justice (Allen, 139).

F. God is sovereign to the whole world and Lord of the future, v. 21.

V. STRUCTURE AND ANALYSIS.

A. Title and Introduction, 1
B. Judgment on Edom, 2-14
   1. Edom’s Destruction Announced, 2-7
      a. The humbling of her pride, 2-4
      b. The completeness of her destruction, 5-7
   2. Edom's Destruction Reaffirmed, 8-14
      a. Her shame and destruction, 8-10
      b. Her crimes against Israel, 11-14
C. The Day of the Lord, 15-21
   1. Judgment on the Nations but Deliverance for Zion, 15-18
   2. The Lord's Kingdom Established, 19-21