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**Christadelphian EJournal of Biblical Interpretation**

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* Offer analytical and expositional articles on biblical texts.
* Engage with academic biblical studies that originate in other Christian confessions.
* Defend the biblical principles summarised in the common Christadelphian statement of faith.
* Subject the published articles to retrospective peer review and amendment.

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**Editorial**

Blogs are popular; before the EJournal was launched, some thought was given to the decision as to whether a blog would be a more valid undertaking. A blog is characterized by “opinion, observation” by a single writer (or maybe a few) upon which readers may or may not comment. Remarks are short, but there is also space for uploading longer articles. As it happened the EJournal was launched. However, we have now set up a blog as well for short opinions and comments and any responses. It will hold ideas that otherwise might get lost along the way. It can be accessed from our website or directly at ejbi.wordpress.com.

**The Destination and Purpose of the Fourth Gospel**

**Paul Wyns**

J. Ashton describes the problem of John’s audience as follows,

There are, broadly speaking, three questions that may be asked concerning John’s audience or readership: was it (a) universal or particular; (b) Jewish or Gentile (or possibly Samaritan -somewhere in between the two); (c) Christian or non-Christian? If a non-Christian audience is intended then the writer’s aim could be either polemic (attack) or apologetic (defence) or kerygmatic (missionary); if, on the other hand, the audience is Christian then the purpose could be either hortatory (to warn or encourage) or catechetic (to teach or remind). These possibilities are not mutually exclusive, since a writer may have more than one purpose in writing and more than one audience in mind.[[1]](#footnote-1)

In this article and in subsequent articles it will be proposed that the Fourth Gospel (4G) was an early composition (c. 40 C.E.) addressed to the Diaspora community in Ephesus, before the definitive split with Christianity occurred. The synagogue congregation is envisaged as an eclectic mix of first century Jews, (including sectarian movements such as Enochic Judaists, Pharisees, etc.) proselytes, Jewish Christians and followers of the Baptist. The situation warranted a Gospel that emphasised the superiority of Christ. It will be argued in this and subsequent articles that the 4G and the epistle to the Hebrews (c. 67 C.E.) are directed at the Ephesian community, essentially to answer the same problems. Of course, any reconstruction of the original setting that is based on internal evidence alone is open to the charge of subjectivity and circularity. D. A. Carson observes that,

A substantial number of modern proposals has sprung from some scholar’s reconstruction of the Johannine community that is alleged to have called this book forth...Inevitably a degree of circularity is set up: the community is reconstructed by drawing inferences from the Fourth Gospel, and once this background is sufficiently widely accepted, the next generation of scholars tends to build on it, or modify it only slightly, by showing how the Fourth Gospel achieves its purpose by addressing that situation so tellingly. The circularity is not necessarily vicious, but is far weaker than is often assumed, owing to the high number of merely possible but by no means compelling inferences that are invoked to delineate the community in the first place.[[2]](#footnote-2)

However, this is mitigated by presenting a cumulative case, drawn from multiple NT sources. Although individual points may be interpreted differently, their collective weight is to be given serious consideration. The progression of this study will throw light on the development of early Christianity away from the synagogue.

**A Survey of Johannine Studies**

Before our investigation commences it is perhaps useful to look at current advances in Johannine scholarship. The following survey does not pretend to be exhaustive – it is merely an outline of the major trends in Johannine scholarship regarding dating, composition and the audience of the 4G.[[3]](#footnote-3) Often theories will not stand the test of time and will need to be amended when new facts surface.

The 4G was always thought to be a linear development of NT theology, following the view that a high or developed Christology must necessarily be late – this had to be subsequently amended with the discovery of Rylands Papyrus 457, an Egyptian Codex fragment containing John 18:31-33, 37, 38, and dated by scholars to the early second century. This pushed the date of the Gospel back towards Christ and validated its claims to eye-witness testimony, given that time was needed to write the Gospel and to copy and circulate it as far afield as Egypt. A date of 90-100 is now widely accepted by scholars of all persuasions. We would argue that 90-100 represents the *terminus ad quem* (latest possible date). As J. A. T. Robinson remarks, “radical critics like Baur began by dating it anything up to 170 and have since steadily come down”.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Similarly, scholarship has long sought to understand the 4G against the Greek conceptual world. In his seminal studies on the 4G, C. H. Dodd understood the reader as a devout and thoughtful citizen of Ephesus, tolerably well acquainted with Hellenistic ideas. Ashton remarks that the reader that Dodd envisions is,

...too Greek and insufficiently Jewish. Dodd’s ideas were worked out long before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls.[[5]](#footnote-5)

The readers to whom John wrote needed to be told the significance of the word ‘Messiah’ (1:41) and names like ‘Siloam’ (9:7). On the other hand, he was prepared to give the Hebrew version of Greek terms meaning ‘pavement’ (19:13) or ‘the place of the skull’ (19:17). Presumably they were native Greek speaking Diaspora Jews, who had lost their familiarity with Hebrew. The 4G demonstrates particular concerns for Samaritans (4:9; 8:48) as well as Gentiles (Greek Diaspora Jews? 7:35; 12:2) and hostility towards the “Jews” (VIoudai/oi). The 71 occurrences of the forms of VIoudai/oi have engendered much discussion,[[6]](#footnote-6) but the context and number (70+1) indicate that we are dealing with a particular group of “Jews”, namely the *Jewish authorities* – the high priest and the ruling council of the **Sanhedrin** (seventy), who were supposedly “teachers in Israel” (John 3:1, 10).

In the last decades of the 20c., a paradigm shift occurred, which saw wider recognition of the essential Jewish (rather than Hellenistic) background of the 4G. In his assessment of J. L. Martyn’s contribution to Johannine scholarship, D. Moody Smith states in his foreword to Martyn’s re-issued work that,

Martyn, unlike the dominant interpreters before him, took seriously the tension and hostility between “the Jews” and Jesus as the key to the historical life-setting and purpose of the Gospel of John. His entire proposal is based on two assumptions or insights. First, the prominence of the Jews and their hostility to Jesus and his disciples likely represents a genuine historical setting (that is, it is not an exercise in theological symbolism). Second, this historical setting can scarcely be that of Jesus and his actual, original disciples and opponents. As is well known, Martyn finds the major key to that setting in the thrice repeated reference to the expulsion from the synagogue of those who confess belief in Jesus (9:22; 12:42; 16:2), and more particularly in the evangelist’s statement that “the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess him to be the Messiah, he would be an excommunicate from the synagogue”.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Martyn based his identification of John’s background on the “Birkat Ha-Minim” (*Benediction Concerning Heretics*),[[8]](#footnote-8) a Jewish prayer that was supposedly employed to smoke out Christians who, when they refused to repeat it in the Synagogue, were ex-communicated. However, W. Meeks[[9]](#footnote-9) regards the benediction as a kind of red herring in Johannine scholarship, as the benediction’s date and purpose are disputed. Robinson states that it is “an inference whose precarious basis it is desirable to expose in some detail”,[[10]](#footnote-10) and D. R. A. Hare regards the connection as entirely unproven.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Nevertheless, Martyn’s contribution to Johannine Studies is useful. For example, Carson observes in relation to John 9 and the account of the Lame Man,

By far the most influential work on this chapter in recent years is that of J. Louis Martyn (HTFG, pp.24ff.), who uses John 9 as the critical ‘test case’ for his overarching thesis. Martyn believes that John’s Gospel was written to help the church, probably in Ephesus, in its degenerating relationships with the local synagogue. To that end, John composed several of his chapters on two tiers, or at two levels. The first level takes place ‘back there’, during the ministry of Jesus; the second takes place in the life of the church at Ephesus.[[12]](#footnote-12)

While we would hesitate to agree with all of Martyn’s conclusions, our own investigation has confirmed that the 4G does work at two levels. Robinson illustrates this when he observes of John 7:35,

Where the Jews ask: Where does he (Jesus) intend to go, that we should not be able to find him? Will he go to the Dispersion among the Greeks, and teach the Greeks?

…Like other uncomprehending remarks in the gospel, and especially those a few verses later about Galilee and Bethlehem (7:40-42, 52), this is both a total misunderstanding and the ironic truth. Of course Jesus will not go to the Greeks of the dispersion (he is going to the Father)—yet they will find him (unlike the disbelieving Judaeans).[[13]](#footnote-13)

The 4G functions at two levels—“back there”—in the time of Jesus, and in the present “here and now” of John’s readers.

In agreement with Meeks, therefore, we would prefer to think of the benediction as a linear development in which the promulgation of the Birkat Ha-Minim was a culmination rather than the beginning point of a development. This development commenced with the persecution of Stephen and the apostles and ended some 50 years (or more) later with the benediction and the excommunication of Christians.

Martyn’s observation that the historical setting (of the Gospel) can scarcely be that of Jesus and his actual disciples and opponents is influenced by the perceived late date of the benediction (although this date is disputed). However, it can be conceded that John used particular historical settings from Jesus’ ministry for **his own objectives**: namely, it was up to the Evangelist (under guidance of the Spirit) to select the particular incidents and the particular emphasis (spin) that he wished to place on those incidents in order to get his message across to his audience; (he was not merely writing a biography). John certainly had plenty of material to choose from (21:25) and his selection criteria were determined by the problems that were facing his readers. We might then say that the Gospel had dual reference points: to the “real Jesus” (and his historical setting) – “back there” – and to the current problems- the “here and now” of John’s contemporaries (and their particular historical setting).

John’s approach was to achieve a blend that would inform the reader about the life of Jesus as well as addressing the reader’s current problems. If the original incidents had no basis in history then they would have lost all power to exhort the reader. Robinson (following his mentor, Dodd)[[14]](#footnote-14) believes that the 4G is more primitive than comparable synoptic material and that it correctly reflects the religious, political and geographical conditions of Palestine and Jerusalem prior to the Jewish war of 66-70. Consequently, Robinson dates the Gospel c. 40-65 C.E., and in his book, *Priority of John*, he forcefully puts the case that it is the Gospel closest to the “source” (namely, to Jesus himself, although this does not necessarily mean that it was the first Gospel written).

**John the Baptist in the Fourth Gospel**

John the Baptist had a huge impact on the national consciousness and he is described in glowing terms by the Pharisee Josephus (c. 93-94 C.E.).[[15]](#footnote-15) The Baptist’s influence was felt as far afield as Ephesus (Acts 18:25; 19:1-7). J. Taylor observes,

Since mention of John the Baptist in the New Testament is obviously overlaid with a developing insistence on Jesus’ superiority, we can suppose that the issue of John himself was a problem for the early Church. Clearly, John was not a nobody in his time, and the Gospels accord him respect. However, John was not permitted too much respect; people had to know his place. As John Meier states, most often “the interpretation aims at neutralizing the Baptist’s independence to make him safe for Christianity”.[[16]](#footnote-16)

L. Morris concurs:

The great Apollos is first introduced as one who “knew only the baptism of John” (Acts 18:25). Our author [of the Fourth Gospel] does not enter into controversy with such people, but he insists more than any of the other Evangelists on the subordinate place of the Baptist. One of the aims of this Gospel plainly was to show how clearly and consistently John had pointed people to Jesus. Apparently the movement associated with the Baptist’s name was particularly strong in the region where this Gospel was written. If, as seems probable, the author of the Gospel came from the group originally centered on John, his interest in his former teacher would be natural. This interest would not be lessened by the fact that John’s was the witness borne to Christ by the last of the prophets of the old covenant.[[17]](#footnote-17)

**The Place of Composition**

The external evidence rests predominately on the statement from Irenaeus (c. 130-200 C.E.): “John the disciple of the Lord, who leaned on his breast, also published the Gospel while living at Ephesus in Asia” (*Haer.* 3, 1.1; quoted in Eusebius, *Hist.* *Eccl.* 5.8.4.), and is assessed in the standard commentaries. After discussing the merits of Ephesus, Antioch and Alexandria as the place of composition, Morris comments,

None of these suggestions can be said to be compelling, and in the end we are left without certain proof. Perhaps there is little more to be said for Ephesus than for either of the others, but this is as far as we can go.[[18]](#footnote-18)

C. K. Barrett presents the problem with the internal evidence as follows:

The New Testament knows nothing of the residence of the apostle John in Asia. 1 John is anonymous; 2 and 3 John profess to have been written by an ‘Elder’ (2 John 1; 3 John 1). Revelation, clearly a work which had its origin in Asia, was written by a person called John, but he seems to distinguish himself from the apostles (see 18.20; 21.14). In Galatians John is found in Jerusalem (Gal. 2.9). Perhaps more important is the fact that neither Ephesians nor Acts shows any awareness of the presence of John in Ephesus. In particular, there is nothing in the speech attributed to Paul in Acts 20.18-35 (that addressed to the Ephesian elders at Miletus) to suggest that the compiler of Acts, who, no doubt, was responsible for the present form of the speech, knew that John had subsequently lent his stabilizing influence to that church.[[19]](#footnote-19)

Barrett’s observations are insightful as they delineate the questions that must be answered, namely, (1) why do Pauline and other writings reflect no knowledge of John’s ministry in Ephesus; and (2) what is the relationship between the Johannine writings; are they written by John the son of Zebedee (or by different John’s - John the Elder *and* John son of Zebedee)?

**Conclusion**

Just as science only advances when the orthodoxy is challenged and tested against observation, so also Biblical scholarship can only advance when hypotheses are tested. Sometimes a new consensus can be reached relatively quickly when new discoveries are made (such as a Papyrus or the DSS); otherwise, advances must be made more slowly, by re-evaluating and sifting the internal evidence again – this is more difficult and often subjective. Bearing this in mind we will take away the following general points from scholarship and apply them in future articles in a fresh look at the destination and purpose of the 4G.

1. Consensus date 90-100 but advocates for an earlier date 40-65.
2. Destination probably Ephesus but external evidence weak.
3. Gospel reflects Jewish hostility to Christians but not necessarily a post-70 separation caused by Twelfth Benediction.
4. Gospel reflects problems with followers of John the Baptist.
5. Problem(omission): Pauline writings unaware of John in Ephesus.
6. Problem (relationship): Are all the Johannine writings by the same hand?

**The Fourth Gospel and Paul**

**Paul Wyns**

In the previous article on the destination and purpose of the 4G, it was proposed that the Gospel was written to the *Ephesian* *Diaspora* community by John the son of Zebedee before the definitive split with Christianity. It was suggested that the Gospel had dual reference points: to the “real Jesus” (and his historical setting)—“back there”, and to the current problems—the “here and now” of John’s contemporaries (and their particular historical setting). A major objection with this contextualization, noted by various scholars, is the apparent ignorance of Paul regarding John. The opposite is also true, for the 4G does not show any influence from the Pauline writings.[[20]](#footnote-20) The last question is easily answered if the 4G was of early provenance; if it was written before any of the Pauline epistles had wide circulation, John could scarcely be influenced by Pauline theology. The former objection is more difficult; how could Paul, who was the founder of the Ephesian ecclesia (i.e. in a split from the synagogue), be ignorant of earlier work done by John?

**John in the Gospels**

In the Synoptic Gospels John is portrayed as the brother of James, both being the sons of Zebedee. They were from a wealthy and influential family involved in the fishing trade in Galilee (cf. Mk 1:20; Lk 5:10). They were called the “sons of thunder” (Mk 3:17) probably because of their quick temperament (Mk 9:38-41; Lk 9:51-54) and aggressive ambition (Mk 10:35-45; Matt 20; 20-21). James and John along with Peter and Andrew (all fishing partners cf. Lk 5:10) were called to follow Jesus (Mk 1:19-20).

The “beloved disciple” is said to be connected with the authorship of the 4G (John 21:20-24), but as he is unnamed the question of authorship is left open. He is the “disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 13:23; 19:26-27; 20:2; 21:7, 20; 21:4; and possibly 1:40; 18:15; 19:35). He was a former disciple of John the Baptist (John 1:40), closely associated with Andrew the brother of Peter and with Philip who all lived in Bethsaida. The beloved disciple also has contacts with the high-priestly household (John 18:15) and seems to have had access to the inner core of the Jerusalem leadership. Along with several women he witnessed the crucifixion and took Mary the mother of Jesus into his protection (John 19:25-29). He was also the first of the twelve to see the empty tomb (John 20:2-3). The traditional understanding is that “the beloved disciple” is a circumlocution for John the son of Zebedee, although that conclusion is not taken for granted in scholarship.

**John in the Book of Acts and the Epistles**

In Acts 12:2 we are informed of the death of John’s brother James, the first apostolic martyr, a victim of the sword during the persecution undertaken by Herod Agrippa I. Before that event, we learn of John’s early witnessing in Jerusalem and his subsequent missionary activity in Samaria, both events undertaken together with Peter. After that event, John disappears from the record of Acts, and is only mentioned by Paul as a “pillar of the church” in Galatians (Gal 2:9). J. A. T. Robinson proposes that Galatians refers to a missionary agreement that was reached between Paul and the apostles (we think here particularly of Peter together with James and John the sons of Zebedee) *prior* to the council in Jerusalem (set to clarify matters with James the brother of the Lord) in Acts 15—Peter, James and John were to preach to the *Diaspora* (scattered Jews) and Paul to the Gentiles. Robinson remarks,

It may be sheer coincidence, but it is in writings attributed to these latter designated for mission among the Jews that the only three occurrences of the word ‘Diaspora’ [diaspora/|] occur in the New Testament (James 1:1; 1 Peter 1:1; John 7:35).[[21]](#footnote-21)

Robinson understands this as indicative of missionary activity by Peter, James and John among the *Diaspora* in the 50s (cf.1 Cor 9:15). F. F. Bruce concurs with this view that there was an agreement prior to the council of Acts 15,

The majority view is that the visit of Gal 2:1-10 is identical with that of Acts 15:2ff. The view taken here is that it is to be identified with the visit of Acts 11:30, in the fourteenth year after Paul’s conversion.[[22]](#footnote-22)

This leaves the possibility open that John conducted missionary work in the same areas as Paul but to a different audience. A proposed chronology would see John in Jerusalem and his mission to Samaria between 30 to 40, and any mission activity to the *Diaspora* in Asia (from a base in Ephesus) sometime between 40 and 50.

**The Fourth Gospel and Luke-Acts**

Paul may be unaware of John’s work in Ephesus,[[23]](#footnote-23) but his companion Luke demonstrates thematic familiarity with the 4G. If we believe Acts[[24]](#footnote-24) to be completed relatively early (c. 57-62; Robinson, 1976:90) then any correspondences between Acts and the 4G would push the dating of the Gospel closer to the apostle John as an eyewitness to the events. The Gospel of Luke begins by establishing the religious status of the Baptist and Jesus. They are not rivals; each had his proper place in the unfolding scheme of divine salvation; nevertheless, Jesus is superior to the Baptist, a theme common to the 4G. Given that the information in Luke 1-2 is derived from eyewitness testimony (Luke 1:2-4), it is possible that Luke interviewed Mary and John the son of Zebedee (who she was staying with) in order to write his birth narratives.

I. H. Marshall states that,

It appears probable that Luke had sources at his disposal, and that these came from Palestinian Jewish Christian circles which had links with the family of Jesus.[[25]](#footnote-25)

In the same way, the early chapters of Acts demonstrate, if not an awareness of the 4G, at the very least knowledge of traditions important to John—they share a thematic close to John’s heart—**baptism of water and Spirit** (John 3:5). This is noticeable in the account of the Samaritan mission in Acts 8 as set out in the following table:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Acts 8** | **John 4** |
| *5.* Then Philip went down to the city of **Samaria,** and preached Christ unto them.  *6.*And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake**,** hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. | *39.* And many of **the Samaritans** of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman. |
| *14.* …they **sent** unto them Peter and John [to follow up Philip’s work] | *38*.I **sent** you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour: **other men** laboured (the Baptist and his disciples), and ye are entered into their labours. |
| *16.* …they were **baptized** in the name of the Lord Jesus [with water]. | *2.* disciples **baptize** [in water] |
| *17.* Then laid they their hands on them, and **they received the Holy Spirit.**  *20.* But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that **the gift of God** may be purchased with money. | *10*. Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest **the gift of God**…he would have given thee **living water**. |

The unique phrase th.n dwrea.n tou/ qeou/ (the gift of God), is employed only in John 4:10 and Acts 8:20. Despite the labours wrought by Philip, culminating in water baptism, it was necessary to send the apostles Peter and John to “reap” the Samaritan harvest by administering the “Spirit baptism”.[[26]](#footnote-26) Although they were baptized, they had as yet not received the Spirit, probably because their faith was flawed, as demonstrated by the incident involving Simon Magus.

Shared theological interests (baptism by water and spirit) are complemented by shared patterns in narrative story-telling. For example, correspondences exist between the healing of the lame man (by Peter and John) in Acts 3 and the blind man (by Jesus) in John 9:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Acts 3** | **John 9** |
| *1.* Lame from the womb | *1.* Blind from birth |
| *10.* Then they knew that it was he who sat begging alms…. | *8.* Is not this he who sat and begged? |
| *7.* Solomon’s Porch | (John 10:23) Solomon’s Porch |
| *22.* For **Moses** truly said to the fathers…. | *28.* You are His disciple, but we are **Moses**’ disciples |
| (Acts 4:16) For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them is **manifest** to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny *it.* | *3.* That the works of God should be **manifested** in him |

**Conclusion**

If we are correct in finding that Luke-Acts shows awareness of the 4G (and we have only given two examples), then this pushes the date of the Gospel further back towards Christ. Our argument also begins to lay to rest the objection that Paul was not aware of any work done by John in Ephesus. It is hardly plausible that Luke (who is generally accepted as a companion of Paul) was aware of the 4G while Paul was ignorant. The most likely place for transmission of the Johannine traditions was the Ephesian Diaspora.

## **Worship of Jesus**

**T. Gaston**

One of the most favoured,[[27]](#footnote-27) and certainly one of the most compelling, arguments used by Trinitarians in support of the deity of Jesus is the Judeo-Christian practice of monolatry, that is, the exclusive worship of one God. Evangelical Christian, J. McDowell, cites the frequent examples of Jesus being worshipped in the gospel records as evidence for his deity, saying:

In all of those instances, the same Jesus who had rebuked Satan for tempting him to worship wrongly did not recoil in horror because ‘Only God is to be worshipped’. Instead, he received the worship as his due.[[28]](#footnote-28)

Conservative scholar, J. C. O’Neill, uses a similar argument to show that the doctrine of the Trinity is present in early Christian, and even in pre-Christian Jewish, texts, despite the fact that the terminology is not used.

For a doctrine of the Trinity to be present we must find that the name of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is invoked in worship alongside the name of the Father in such a way that it is clear that neither the Son nor the Holy Spirit is thought as a created being like one of the angels. Worship must be offered to God alone; if the Son and the Holy Spirit are invoked in worship, and there is no suspicion that they are created beings, then willy-nilly we have belief in the Trinity.[[29]](#footnote-29)

R. Bauckham is more reserved, but he too uses this argument. He does not think that worship itself **defines** something as God, but it is an exclusive response to God.[[30]](#footnote-30) He does not use this as a conclusive test, since he recognizes “there may be a few marginal instances of the worship of angels”,[[31]](#footnote-31) but when the worship of Jesus is recorded alongside key descriptions (such as ‘sovereignty over all things’, and ‘the divine name’) then “for Jewish monotheists [this] is recognition of the unique divine identity”,[[32]](#footnote-32) i.e. Jesus is being identified as God.

Jewish monolatry was born out of the commandments to have only one God (Deut 5:7, 6:4) and not to make and worship idols (Deut 5:8-10). That the practice of monolatry was accepted by the early Christians is evidenced by the quotation of these commandments in the New Testament (Matt 4:10). Paul decries those who “worshiped [seba,zomai] and served [latreu,w] the creature rather than the Creator” (Rom 1:25) and the worship of angels is also condemned (Col 2:18,[[33]](#footnote-33) Rev 19:10, 22:9). The worship of Jesus is quite explicit in the gospels, (Matt 2:2, 11, 8:2, 9:18, 14:33, 15:25, 20:8, 28:9, 17; Mark 5:6, 15:19; Luke 24:52; John 9:58), most frequently in Matthew, and the worship of ‘the Lamb’ is a feature of Revelation (Rev 5:8-14). There is also reference to the worship of Jesus in the writings of Paul (Phil 2:10-11). Do these references indicate that the early Christians ascribed to Jesus a “unique divine identity”?

The word used in the gospel records for the worship of Jesus is proskune,w which literally means ‘to bow down to kiss’.[[34]](#footnote-34) The word is used in Hellenistic pagan religion where one would bow down before an idol to kiss its feet. This etymology does, to a certain extent, inform its usage, even in Judeo-Christian circles. Bauckham states, “The typical Hellenistic view was that worship is a matter of degree because divinity is a matter of degree”.[[35]](#footnote-35) Lesser divinities and even mortal men could be worshipped.[[36]](#footnote-36) The Jews who translated the Septuagint used proskune,w in the same way, both of the worship of God and of the reverence paid to mortal men.[[37]](#footnote-37) Because proskune,w can also be directed towards men, it is sometimes translated as verbs of action (i.e. ‘to bow’) rather than necessarily denoting worship. It is thus sometimes used in the sense of begging (Exod 11:8).[[38]](#footnote-38)

Patterns of use in the Septuagint almost certainly informs the New Testament, and so the use of proskune,w does not necessary imply an act of worship in accord with Jewish monolatry. For example, you can ‘fall down before’ [proskune,w] a human master (Matt 18:26). It is also significant that in Revelation Jesus promises the church in Philadelphia that he will make their Jewish adversaries “come and bow down [proskune,w] before your feet” (Rev 3:9). The examples of Jesus being worshipped in the gospels do not necessarily imply that Jesus was worshipped as a god, rather than being reverenced as a superior.[[39]](#footnote-39)

In both the Septuagint and the New Testament it is se,bomai[[40]](#footnote-40) [‘to worship’] that is used of the exclusive worship of God, denoting the concept of religious reverence, rather than the action of bowing. This word is not used with reference to Jesus, only with reference to God. Paul uses a cognate of this word in Rom 1:25 when decrying the worship of ‘creatures’.

**“For ‘Hebrew’ read ‘Aramaic’”**

**John W. Adey**

**Introduction**

In this article we counter the assumption operative in two recent English translations (NIV, NET) summed up in the footnote text “For ‘Hebrew’ we should read ‘Aramaic’”. There is a family of words to discuss and we first set out the correct renderings before showing the choices made by the NIV and NET and contrasting these with the KJV.

**A Family of “Hebrew” Type Words**

**(1)** Greek:~Ebrai?sti

Transliteration:Hebraisti

Translation: Hebrew (tongue)

Recent English versions give ‘Aramaic’ in the main text for this word, although translators know ‘Hebraisti’ (‘Hebrew’) is in the Greek text(s) that they are using; sometimes this is footnoted. The Greek for ‘Aramaic’ – ‘Suristi’ - is never used in the Greek New Testament.

Whilst Aramaic was a language of multilingual Palestine, Josephus, Philo and the NT make no mention of any Aramaic Targum(s) — translations of Hebrew Bible — in the synagogue. Aramaic Targums only become well established after 70 C.E. and into the Middle Ages’ diaspora.

**(2)** Greek:th/| ~Ebrai<di diale,ktw|

Transliteration:tē Hebraidi dialéktō

Translation: Hebrew/Hebrew language

This expression refers to the language spoken by Paul and Jesus. The Hebrew of the 1st cent. C.E. Israel is a form of (what has been described as) ‘Late Biblical Hebrew’ (LBH) developing towards ‘Rabbinic’**/**‘Mishnaic’ Hebrew. More widely, but notably at Qumran, Hebrew is spoken. The literature there is over 90% Hebrew; some Aramaic; some Greek. Aramaic Targum (translation) fragments of Job and Leviticus have been found, but no other Hebrew Bible books translated into Aramaic.[[41]](#footnote-41)

**(3)** Greek: :Eber

Transliteration:Eber (Heb root: ‛br/ Greek stem:ebr)

Translation: Heber/Eber

This name occurs in Luke 3:35. Genealogically and linguistically, ‘Eber’ links to ‘Hebrew’ and ‘Hebrews’;[[42]](#footnote-42) in Greek, Eber & ~Ebrai?sti have the same stem: Ebr.

**(4)** Greek:~Ebrai/oi / tou.j ~Ebrai,ouj

Transliteration:Hebraioi / tous Hebraious

Translation: Hebrews / the Hebrews

The expression ‘tous Hebraious’ occurs in Acts 6:1 and there is a racial contrast between the Hellenists. The NET has the contrast set out as, “the Greek-speaking Jews against the native Hebraic Jews”. Here the NET avoids commitment to ‘Hebrew speaking’ with its ‘native Hebraic Jews’.

**(5)** Greek:~Ebrai/oj evx ~Ebrai,wn

Transliteration:Hebraios ex Hebraiōn

Translation: ‘Hebrew of the Hebrews’

This expression is used by Paul in Phil 3:5. He does not say that he was an ‘Aramaen of the Aramaens’ which would be a claim to be Syrian (Su,roj), but rather that he was racially of the family ‘of Israel’.[[43]](#footnote-43)

**Translation Choices**

We have compared below three versions and their rendering of the family of “Hebrew” type words—KJV, NIV and NET. Their respective pedigrees are,

**KJV**: (1611) The Byzantine Majority Greek text represents the text type reflected among the vast majority of extant manuscripts. It is from this family of Byzantine texts that the early printed Greek New Testaments (the so called “Textus Receptus” editions) and early English versions such as the Bishop's, Geneva, Coverdale, and King James Version derive.

**N**ew **I**nternational **V**ersion: “(beginning in 1965) … [involved] Christian Reformed Church and the National Associations of Evangelicals… new translation in contemporary English…by over a hundred scholars…Greek text…an eclectic one....Where existing manuscripts differ, the translators made their choice of readings according to accepted principles of New Testament textual criticism”.[[44]](#footnote-44)

**N**ew **E**nglish **T**ranslation: “(internet aimed and tested via www.bible.orgwebsite began 1994) is a completely new translation of the Bible…[by] more than 25 biblical scholars – experts in the original biblical languages – It unlocks the riches of the Bible’s truth from entirely new perspectives…it became clear that a free online Bible would be needed…copyrighted Bibles can’t be quoted in a huge collection of online studies…in its testing process all working drafts of the…NET project listened to its readers”.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Greek:~Ebrai?sti | |
| KJV | **Hebrew:** John 5:2 Bethesda; 19:13 Gabbatha, 17 Golgotha, 20 superscription; [20:16 no language given for ‘Rabonni’] |
| **Hebrew:** Rev. 9:11 Abaddon (Job 28:2); 16:16 Armageddon (Zech 12:11) |
| NIV | **Aramaic:** John 5:2 Bethesda; 19:13 Gabbatha, 17 Golgotha, 20 Superscription; **‘Aramaic’ put for ‘Rabboni’ in 20:16, yet their eclectic Greek text has: Hebraisti.** |
| **Hebrew:** Rev. 9:11 Abaddon (Job 28:2);  16:16 Armageddon (Zech 12:11) |
| NET | **Aramaic:** John 5:2 Bethesda; 19:13 Gabbatha, 17 Golgotha, 20 Superscription; **‘Aramaic’ put for ‘Rabboni’ in 20:16, yet ‘Hebraisti’ features in their Greek text(s).** |
| **Hebrew:** Rev. 9:11 Abaddon (Job 28:2);  16:16 Armageddon (Zech 12:11) |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | th/| ~Ebrai<di diale,ktw| | :Eber |
| KJV | **Hebrew:**  Paul:  Acts 21:40; 22:2.  Jesus:  Acts 26:14 - 15 | **Luke 3:35**  GNT & LXX reflect Hebrew **‘Eber’** Gen 11:15. |
| NIV | **Aramaic:**  Paul:  Acts 21:40; 22:2.  Jesus:  Acts 26:14 - 15 | **Luke 3:35**  GNT & LXX reflect Hebrew **‘Eber’** Gen 11:15. |
| NET | **Aramaic:**  Paul:  Acts 21:40; 22:2.  Jesus:  Acts 26:14 - 15 | **Luke 3:35**  GNT & LXX reflect Hebrew **‘Eber’** Gen 11:15. |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | ~Ebrai/oi /  tou.j ~Ebrai,ouj | ~Ebrai/oj evx ~Ebrai,wn |
| KJV | **2 Cor 11:22** Are they ***Hebrews***? so am I. Are they Israelites? so am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? so am I. | **Phil 3:5** Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an ***Hebrew of the Hebrews.*** |
| NIV | **2 Cor 11:22** Are they ***Hebrews***? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham's descendants? So am I. | **Phil 3:5** circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a ***Hebrew of Hebrews.*** |
| NET | **2 Cor 11:22** Are they ***Hebrews***? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. | **Phil 3:5** I was circumcised on the eighth day, from the people of Israel and the tribe of Benjamin, a ***Hebrew of Hebrews.*** |

**Conclusion**

Our conclusion is that NIV and NET versions are contrary and inconsistent in switching to ‘Aramaic’ because,

(a) they do not **always** render the Greek ‘Hebraisti’ as ‘Hebrew’, and

(b) the Greek for ‘Aramaic’ is ‘Suristi’ and is ***never*** used in the GNT.

GNT’s ‘tongue’ & ‘language’ refer to native or national speech groups as understood on a titular basis (John 19:20), ranking Hebraisti with Greek and Latin.

The footnote found in the NET and NIV, “For ‘Hebrew’ read ‘Aramaic’”, reflects the translators’ analytically indecisive policies.

# Proto-Christadelphians

**T. Gaston**

**Introduction**

A common theme in many Christadelphian writings, particularly in continuous-historic interpretations of Revelation, is a concept of the ‘faithful remnant’, i.e. the idea that throughout history there has been individuals and groups who have remained faithful to “the Truth”. Therefore there have many attempts to identify “proto-Christadelphian” groups in the pages of history. For instance, in *Eureka* J. Thomas refers to the Donatists,[[45]](#footnote-45) the Novatians,[[46]](#footnote-46) the Albigenses and the Waldenses,[[47]](#footnote-47) the Aerians and the Paulicians,[[48]](#footnote-48) the Petrobrusians,[[49]](#footnote-49) the Arnoldists,[[50]](#footnote-50) and the Leonists.[[51]](#footnote-51) He also equates the death of the Two Witnesses with the fate of the Huguenots. Similar lists can be found within the works of other writers, often dependent upon *Eureka.*[[52]](#footnote-52) Such groups are often identified by their dissension from the Church of Rome.

However these efforts to identify proto-Christadelphian groups present us with a problem, one ably recognized by R. Roberts:

Are we to consider, then, that the churches in Roman Africa in the fourth and fifth centuries, and the various dissenting bodies in Switzerland, France, and others parts, were the true brethren of Christ? If so, why is it that what we, the Christadelphians, consider the truth is not to be found in their writings?[[53]](#footnote-53)

The problem is that, though these groups dissented from Catholicism, they were not Christadelphians. R. McHaffie took this problem to its logical conclusion and presented the following dilemma: either these groups are not “brethren in Christ” (or proto-Christadelphian) or our definition of “brethren in Christ” is too stringent.[[54]](#footnote-54) McHaffie’s own conclusion is that Christadelphians are too dogmatic regarding those “outside” and regarding which beliefs are necessary for salvation. The other alternative is to acknowledge that these groups were not “brethren in Christ” at all.

One thoughtful solution is the proposition that, while these groups were not a “faithful remnant” themselves, they did provide an environment in which the “remnant” could be preserved.[[55]](#footnote-55) Roberts writes:

Though these communions were not in the mass the body of Christ, they contained it: while the church ascendant – the Catholic sun-invested woman, contained it not at all.[[56]](#footnote-56)

W. H. Barker and W. H. Boulton also comment:

One can well imagine that under the shadow of these greater forces of opposition there would also be that passive resistance exercised by the true believers in Christ.[[57]](#footnote-57)

Yet there is, to the best of my knowledge,[[58]](#footnote-58) no evidence that proto-Christadelphians did exist within these groups.

In this article, I intend to present a synopsis of the beliefs of these various “heretical” groups and examine whether proto-Christadelphians could have flourished, or at least found sanctuary, within them. For the purposes of this article I am defining Christadelphian beliefs according to the *Birmingham Amended Statement of Faith* (BASF)*.* I have marked divergences from that statement, either with an ‘S’ (statements to be accepted) or an ‘R’ (doctrines to be rejected).

### **The Schisms of the 4th Century**

#### **1. The Donatists**

Main Sources: Augustine, *Letters;* Optatus, *On the Schism of the Donatists* (both in Stevenson, *New Eusebius*)[[59]](#footnote-59)

The Donatists are not technically a sect, but are a schism within the early church in North Africa. The schism arose when a group of churches in North Africa refused to recognize the authority of Caecilian, bishop of Carthage, because he had been a “traditor” during the Great Persecution. A traditor was someone who had compromised their faith under persecution, for example, by giving up copies of the Scriptures. The Donatists, as they would become known,[[60]](#footnote-60) believed that such men were not worthy to hold office within the Church and therefore the sacraments and ordinations they performed were invalid.[[61]](#footnote-61)

The Donatists were separated from the Church of Rome on a single issue; they were otherwise orthodox in their beliefs. G. and R. Walker write:

The Donatists … on investigation prove to be orthodox Trinitarians [S1, S2, R2, R3, and R6], holding immortal soulism [R7, R8], belief in the Devil [R11], and so on, and whose only claim to be heretics lay in a desire to appoint their own bishops.[[62]](#footnote-62)

It has sometimes been suggested that the Donatists favoured the separation of Church and State, and opposed the increasing inference of Constantine. Yet they were prepared to appeal to the Emperor when it suited their purposes.[[63]](#footnote-63)

A group of violent fanatics called the Circumcellions are often connected with the Donatists [R35].[[64]](#footnote-64) However, very little is known about the Circumcellions and it is unlikely that their actions are indicative of the whole Donatist movement.[[65]](#footnote-65)

#### **2. Novatians**

Main Source: Eusebius, *The History of the Church,* VI-VII (in Stevenson, *New Eusebius*)

The Novatians were another schism, which arose after the Decian persecution (3rd C.E.). They held a “rigorist attitude toward any form of compromise … [with] the Graeco-Roman outlook and culture”.[[66]](#footnote-66) Nevertheless, they were orthodox in beliefs, except that the denied that lapsed Christians could be renewed to repentance [S14].[[67]](#footnote-67)

### **3. The Manichaean Heresies**

In this section we will examine a series of dissenting groups, who have in common that they are often accused of Manichaeism and Docetism. It will be useful to include a brief introduction to these concepts at this point.

We must proceed with a care since these terms not necessarily always applied fairly to the dissenters, as Thomas asserts:

The names of Arians and Manichaeans, although originally employed to designate sectaries of the class the apostle terms ‘false teachers privily bringing in damnable heresies’ (2 Peter 2:1), they were afterwards used by the ignorant and malicious to distinguish the inhabitants of the mountains and valleys of the other wing of the Great Eagle, in after times known by the general terms Albigenses and Waldenses.[[68]](#footnote-68)

Much that is recorded about these dissenters comes for their Catholic decriers and so must be approached with caution. Roberts writes:

You cannot rely on the portraiture of ecclesiastical history. In after ages, Canon Bowlby, of Birmingham, would be accepted as a competent witness touching the Christadelphians: yet how little, as recent experience has shown us, could we recognize ourselves in his descriptions.[[69]](#footnote-69)

Many articles in the tertiary literature (several cited here) reproduce uncritically the accusations of these Church historians. Nevertheless, it seems likely that many of these groups did hold beliefs in common with the Manichees and the Docetics, though we must proceed with this warning in mind.

#### i) Docetism

Docetism is the belief that Jesus did not actually live as a human being or actually die upon the cross, but only lived and died in appearance. It seems to be this belief that the apostle John was countering in his epistles, writing of those who denied Christ came in the flesh (2 John 7).[[70]](#footnote-70)

This belief appears to have arisen from a metaphysical belief about the dualism of matter and spirit. Matter was considered to be evil and at war with “the realm of the spirit”. Therefore the idea that a being like Jesus could be contaminated by matter was repulsive, and so he was considered to be a purely spiritual being.[[71]](#footnote-71)

Docetism is not only alien to the NT teaching of the humanity of Jesus but also undermines the power of the crucifixion. As this belief is clearly decried in the NT, no group that held such a belief could be considered “brethren in Christ”.

#### ii) Manichaeism

Mani (d. 272 C.E.) was a self-proclaimed prophet and teacher. He regarded Buddha, Zarathustra, Plato and Jesus all as messengers from God and himself as another of these messengers.[[72]](#footnote-72) His teachings were combination of Christian and Persian religious ideas and manifested a Gnostic dualism.

The Manichaeism *gnosis* embodies a complex cosmic drama which centers on a primordial battle between the original principles of Light and Darkness. An initial invasion of Light by Darkness led to a counter-attack by Light, which was designed to fail, tricking the powers of Darkness into swallowing particles of Light. The universe was then created to redeem and purify this captured Light and to punish and imprison the archons of Darkness. […] The soul could be awakened by *gnosis* and made aware of its divine origins.[[73]](#footnote-73)

This focus on *gnosis* (knowledge) led the Manichees to denigrate matter and the body. The Manichees were divided into two classes, the “Elders” who practiced asceticism and celibacy and the “Hearers” who were mere adherents.[[74]](#footnote-74)

The Manichees were persecuted by the Sassanian Empire (Persia), which resulted in the diffusion of the religion throughout the Roman Empire. Following the outbreak of war between the Romans and Sassanians (296 C.E.), the Roman authorities outlawed the religion as a Persian sect.[[75]](#footnote-75) After Christianity became the state religion of the Empire, the authorities continued to legislate against the Manichees. In the sixth century the death penalty was introduced for adherents and the religion was extinguished from Europe. Manichaesim survived in the east, and was influential upon later groups such as the Paulicians, the Bogomils and the Cathars.[[76]](#footnote-76)

#### iii) Albigenes (or Cathars)[[77]](#footnote-77)

Founded in Albania about the eighth century, the Albigenes become particularly popular in northern Italy and southern France during 11th and 12th centuries. Like the Manichees, they had believed in a strict duality between Light and Dark; they even believed that there were two gods, one of the Light and one of the Dark [S1]. Their understanding of Jesus was Docetic, believing that he was an angel with a phantom body. They also taught a form of reincarnationism, believing that the spirits were fallen from their original goodness (Light) and were imprisoned in human bodies (matter). These spirits must pass through a succession of reincarnations until they are purged of the Dark and return to the Light (or heaven) [S4, S5, S16, R10, R23, R30].

In terms of practice, the Albigenses were divided into the ‘Perfect’ and ‘Believers’. The Perfect adhered to the strict practices of the group, which included vegetarianism [R32], and asceticism, sometimes leading to suicide by starvation. They sought salvation through acquiring knowledge. The Believers lived normal lives but were assured salvation if they repented on their death beds. They rejected the sacraments of the Church and were cruelly persecuted.[[78]](#footnote-78)

#### iv) Bogomils

The Bogomils (10th-11th C.E.), like the Albigenes, mirrored Manichean teaching. In particular, they took a Docetic view of Christ and his death. Also like the Albigenes, their taught reincarnation [S2, S9, S12, S13].[[79]](#footnote-79) The Bogomils were divided into the ‘Perfect’ and the ‘Believers’; to become a Perfect, the initiate had to spend more than two years devoted to intensive study and ascetic practices. Among their stranger beliefs, the Bogomils believed that the Devil created the world and that he is the brother of Christ.[[80]](#footnote-80)

#### v) Paulicians

The Paulicians arose in the 6th-7th centuries, expanding particularly in Bulgaria. Their beliefs shared affinities with the Manichees, and other Gnostic groups, professing a dualism between the material and the spiritual; they held that matter is evil [S4]. They believed in two gods, one who made the material world and one who made souls [S1]. Regarding Christ, they believed that he was an angel whose real mother was ‘the heavenly Jerusalem’ [S2, S9, R5]. He was not born the Son of God, but was adopted by God at his baptism. Because of Jesus’ obedience to God’s will, the Holy Spirit made known to him the mystery of the Godhead [S2, S9]. They did not acknowledge Jesus’ death as an atonement for sin, regarding him primarily as a good teacher [S6, S8, S12, S13]. They rejected the Old Testament and most of the New, saving only the writings of Luke and Paul [S8, S18, and R1].

Regarding practice, the Paulicians rejected infant baptism. Initiates were baptized aged 30 after being exorcised by one the “elect” leaders. They retained many traditional Catholic practices, such as the prayers for the dead and the belief that the Eucharist is the blood and body of the Lord. Though they dissented from Catholicism, they maintained that it was acceptable to deny or conceal their beliefs and live as Catholics to avoid persecution [R34, R35]. It is also recorded that the Paulicians had their own army, which was responsible for many brutalities [R35].[[81]](#footnote-81) There also seems to be a similar group who more genuinely followed the teaching of Paul of Samosata, the Paulianists, “who repudiated the doctrine of the Trinity”.[[82]](#footnote-82)

#### vi) Petro-Brusians

This group was founded by Peter Burys, who taught in Embrun, Die and Gap (c.1117 C.E.); he was later burnt for heresy. After his death, his teachings were spread by Henry of Lausanne, though in a modified form.

The Petro-Brusians dissented from the Catholic Church and decried many of its practices. They rejected infant baptism, requiring personal confession prior to baptism, which they regarded as necessary for salvation. They condemned all forms of ceremony and chant, and they rejected the Eucharist because, as Christ gave his flesh and blood, once this cannot be repeated. They also rejected the veneration of crosses and holy sites; the Petro-Brusians taught that crosses and church buildings should be destroyed. In additional they preached, and practiced, violence against priests and monks [R35].

The Petro-Brusians only accepted the authority of the Gospels, rejecting the Old Testament and most of the New [S7, S8, S18, and R1].[[83]](#footnote-83)

#### **4. Waldenses**[[84]](#footnote-84)

The Waldenses (or Vaudois) appeared in the second half of the twelfth century and have continued to this day (in a modified form). We know little of how they were formed. Traditionally, the Waldenses have been associated with Peter Waldo, though we know they predate him. We also know little about their beliefs and practice, or whether indeed the Waldenses were a united fellowship or disparate in both conviction and habitation. Alan Eyre writes, “it is not possible to ascertain with certainty the beliefs and practice of all the scattered Vaudois groups in the Middle Ages and after”.[[85]](#footnote-85)

We do know, not least because of the persecution they received, that they Waldenses were dissenters from the Catholic Church. They rejected such doctrines as purgatory, indulgences and prayers for the dead. They also disowned shrines and other holy places, and orthodox rituals such as chanting. Eyre describes their beliefs as “an essentially pious yet commonsense approach to the Bible”.[[86]](#footnote-86) There is some evidence that the Waldenses believed in the mortality of the soul and the resurrection, though it is not clear that this was universally believed among them.[[87]](#footnote-87)

The Waldenses were divided into two classes. The ‘Perfect’ took vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. They did not engage in any form of manual labour and depended upon the ‘Friends’ for their subsistence. The Friends lived a normal life, marrying and owning property. The Friends also remained within the Catholic Church and received its sacraments, even though Catholic priests were regarded as unworthy [R34, R35]. The Waldenses denounced all forms of lying and refused to take oaths. Their only breaking of bread service was on Holy Thursday.[[88]](#footnote-88)

The Waldenses were predominately differentiated from the Catholic Church by their ecclesiastical concerns rather than their objections to church dogma. A. Harnack observed that the, “Waldensians neither contested the Catholic worship, nor the sacraments and hierarchical constitution in themselves, but considered it a deadly sin that the Catholic ecclesiastics should exercise the rights of successors of the apostles, without taking upon themselves the apostolic life, and they protested against the extensive governing power of the pope and the bishops”.[[89]](#footnote-89)

The Waldenses have continued to this day, though Eyre notes that “the ‘Valdensian’ church in Italy is indistinguishable from the generality of evangelical Protestant sects”.[[90]](#footnote-90)

#### **5. Nestorians or ‘Church of the East’**

Nestorius and his teachings were condemned at the Council of Ephesus. He taught that the Son had two natures in one person, a human nature and a divine nature. For this reason he objected to calling Mary ‘the Mother of God’ as, he argued, she was the mother of the human Jesus, not the divine Son. Nestorianism, therefore, is a deviation regarding the second person of the Trinity; it is not a rejection of that doctrine [S1, S2, R2, and R3]. This is illustrated in an extract from the ‘Hymn of Praise’ by Mar Babai (c. 6th C.E):

One is Christ the Son of God, worshipped by all in two natures ... with beginning before all time ... as the Godhead is three substances in one nature, likewise the Sonship of the Son is in two natures, one person.[[91]](#footnote-91)

The Nestorian Church continues to this day—see [www.nestorian.org](http://www.nestorian.org).

#### **6. The Huguenots**

The Huguenots were French Protestants. Their doctrines were largely those of Luther, adding a belief in absolute predestination [R26]. [[92]](#footnote-92) The Huguenots, though dissenters from the Catholic Church, did not share the central beliefs of the Christadelphians.

### **Conclusions**

This has only been a brief synopsis of some of the dissenting groups sometimes identified as “proto-Christadelphian” or a “faithful remnant”. However, despite the brevity, it should be apparent from this survey that these groups could not be called ‘Christadelphian’, as defined by the BASF. The schisms of the 4th C.E., the Donatists and the Novatians, were orthodox in belief and differed little from the Roman Church. Though the Huguenots were persecuted by the Catholic authorities, their beliefs were not Christadelphian. The fact that these dissenters are hallowed in *Eureka* is a consequence of the Protestant origins of the Continuous-Historic interpretation. The Nestorians do not constitute a superior alternative; while declared heretical, they were Trinitarian through-and-through.

Those dissenters embodying Manichaen principles can only be considered less “scriptural” than the Roman Church. These groups are characterized by a radical dualism, often leading to polytheistic thinking and a Docetic view of Christ that robs the cross of its atoning power. A rejection of most of the scriptures is also common to these groups; presumably the only way of reconciling their beliefs with scripture was to edit it. Reports of violence from these groups may have been exaggerated by their Catholic adversaries; nevertheless, both sides were guilty of bloodshed. These groups were proposed by Thomas because they were heretics, dissenting from the Catholic Church, yet, as the G. and R. Walker point out, “some ‘heretics’ prove, on investigation, to be worse than the orthodox”.[[93]](#footnote-93)

None of these dissenters can be rightly identified as “proto-Christadelphians”. It also seems unlikely that any of these groups would have afforded much protection to any proto-Christadelphian that might have existed. The Donatists or the Nestorians were just as likely to reject and persecute a unitarian thinker as the Catholics, and a proto-Christadelphian would have been just as alien to the Cathars as were the Catholics. The Waldenses alone of all the groups we have considered had significant parallels with modern Christadelphians.

**Consensus Politics**

**Andrew Perry**

Time and again in OT scholarship one comes across an appeal to a consensus view as a way of persuading the reader that an interpretation is correct. More often than not, such a consensus was laid down in older German scholarship of the 19c., what was once known as “Higher Criticism”. An appeal to a consensus and the perpetuation of the consensus can be found in all types of scholarship, both critical and conservative. This is not to deny that critical and conservative scholars do not have their differences, but it is more often the case that conservative critics adopt a critical view and modify those parts of it that undermine a high view Scripture.

The question for this article is whether this is a sound method. Appealing to a consensus is, of course, an appeal to a kind of authority, and as such can only be a fallacy if it is used to *prove* a point. Proof should proceed on the basis of assumptions, premises (both expressing observation) and inference. However, this is not my point, which is, rather, that **consensus politics impedes biblical research**.

Standard pedagogy for research students beginning a thesis dictates that the student should focus only on the primary sources and ignore all secondary literature; in this way it is hoped that original ideas and questions may emerge unalloyed by the work of previous scholars. At the same time, standard methodology in the UK is for the research student to first produce a review of research as a way of setting out in detail his/her research proposal for an initial evaluation by supervising academics. The two requirements are incompatible, but in any event it may only be a forlorn hope that a research student could look at the primary sources, as it were, without the influence of secondary scholarship already having made its mark. In a way, what the pedagogical ideal is aiming for is nothing more than a questioning approach on the part of the student and to spark originality.

A review of scholarship will soon highlight where majority opinion has fallen on a given topic. As an historical overview, it will discover what range of viewpoint has been expressed, and notable scholars of the past will be gathered according to their “school of thought”—but it will also become plain that past views have been superseded and that there is a modern received consensus. One easy route for a student pursuing research is to rehabilitate the approach of an older scholar in modern guise. Here s/he is deflected by the modern consensus to re-visit older lines of thought in order to “say something”; the thesis thus becomes a history of ideas.

The consensus on a biblical subject can also direct the student away into other extra-biblical topics. These may very well be worthy topics of research in themselves, but our point is that a consensus has driven the student to look for “gaps in the market” elsewhere; a proverb common in academic NT scholarship is that “its all been done”—there are no original ideas to be had. At the same time as receiving this wisdom, a student thinking of a research topic may well be advised to consider the OT “where there is still useful work to be done”. One way to appreciate this situation is to review the seminar programme of the annual SBL conference and count the number of seminars sessions devoted to extra-biblical topics; new biblical exegesis is not as common as one would have expected in a society for *biblical* literature.

The consensus in a biblical subject will often lead a student to apply a new method to the primary texts—a method inevitably devised outside of Biblical Studies and brought in and applied to the biblical texts. This will produce original writing and illuminate the text to a degree. For example, since the 1970s there has been a whole raft of literary theories applied to the biblical text with favourable results for the bible student. It has to be said though that the application of, say, a structuralist analytical framework may not produce exegetical insight. J. D. G. Dunn once remarked to me [in conversation] upon the fashion for Greimas’ structural analysis in the 1980s that he doubted whether any real exegetical insights were being offered in the student theses he was examining. Often, new analytical frameworks may appear to be nothing more than an end in themselves.

**There is a direct connection between church doctrine and a scholarly consensus on a NT topic**. While NT scholars mark a distinction between Dogmatics and NT historical scholarship, their description of the “data” directly affects the possibilities for doctrinal development using the NT text. Church doctrine manifests its own consensus and this reinforces a corresponding consensus in NT scholarship. For example, it might not be surprising to discover that a Pentecostal scholar studying Acts 2 will more than likely come up with results supportive of their own confession.

Fundamental researches—research that questions the researcher’s confessional (doctrinal) stance, or Christianity in general, is impeded by consensus politics. Perhaps the best NT research can only be done by Jewish scholars or students from outside the Christian mainstream. Certainly, it is worthwhile collecting the books of those scholars that have been ostracized by the mainstream biblical academic community, as they often have the “out of the box” ideas that open up the text.

Consensus is not abstract; it is maintained. Just like the doctrines of the church, which are maintained by the professional clergy, confessional academics, and church synods and councils, consensus is maintained in academic circles. One way consensus is maintained is by **peripheral repetition**. Because of specialization in biblical research, all peripheral areas are “taken on trust”, i.e. a student will take on board the consensus view from a peripheral area if s/he has to include a position-statement from such an area in his/her thesis. This happens frequently and it reinforces the consensus in those peripheral areas through dint of repetition. For example, a NT scholar will trust what s/he reads in OT commentaries, especially if the few that are consulted are all pulling in the same direction. A NT scholar is rarely an OT specialist.

More significantly, **consensus is maintained socially**. Reputation and authority are important influences on the maintenance of a *status quo*, and the scholarly community is, above all, a social group, meeting and talking “shop”, and reading each other’s writings. They respect authority in a field and there is a pecking order in university ranks. The best academics are meant to end up at the best institutions and their views are accorded a preferential status.

There are confessional sub-groups to recognise in this situation, and a conservative and a critical consensus might be maintained by different groups. For example, in NT scholarship there is a consensus that some NT writings betray a pre-existence and incarnation Christology—the consensus is more prevalent in conservative scholarship. This is maintained socially as well as confessionally; it would be difficult to present a successful thesis that sought to overturn this consensus. Thus, while Dunn (*Christology in the Making*) limited to the Gospel of John the NT writings in which incarnation could be found, he was widely criticized for his position. It would be impossible to present new exegetical material showing that even John was no haven for pre-existence Christology; the exegesis (which exists in some recent Christadelphian writing) would come up against the sheer weight of numbers in the orthodox consensus.

**Consensus requires conformity** and conforming to a consensus position is a pressure that is felt in any social group, from the playground to the hall of residence. In research communities, pressure might come from peers, academic supervisors and examiners, as well as the student’s own aspirations. If a student wants to develop an academic career, s/he may well feel pressure to conform to certain positions in order to “get on in life”. As in business and employment generally, academic patronage is important to success.

Christadelphians live in a world outside the consensus of church doctrine, although this is less the case with NT and OT scholarship—here there is less scepticism on the part of Christadelphians for conservative consensus scholarship and there ought to be a healthier scepticism.

While this article has been negative about consensus, it would be unbalanced not to recognise that truth can lie with a consensus just as with a minority. It would be a fallacy to suggest otherwise. The article is rather a warning about how consensus politics can impede research, not that consensus views are inevitably wrong. There is much of value in conservative consensus scholarship.

**Marginal Notes**

**John 21:8**

The epilogue of John appears to be an appendix, written by a disciple of John, in order to clarify the destiny of Peter and John, and lending supporting testimony to the veracity of the Gospel. This addition was probably necessitated by John’s absence. Interestingly, when James (the brother of John) was murdered and Peter arrested - upon his release the angel instructed Peter to **“gird himself”** (Acts 12:8). This indicated to Peter that it was not his time to die yet because he knew the Lord’s words in John 21:8: “Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you **girded yourself** and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and **another will gird you** and carry *you* where you do not wish” (John 21:8).

**Acts 9:2**

It has long been recognised by scholars that “the Way” is a term of reference for the early Christian community:

…and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. Acts 9:2 (NASB) cf. Acts 19:9, 23, 22:4, 24:14, 22

That early Christians should think of their teaching and practice as a “way of life” is unexceptionable. However, “the Way” is not functioning as a description of a way of life. As such, it would be an inane metaphor. Rather, the usage of the phrase here indicates a social term of identity. Thus, Felix is reported as,

…having a rather accurate knowledge of the Way, put them off, saying, ‘When Lysias the tribune comes down, I will decide your case’. Acts 24:22 (RSV)

In a recent book, J. Blenkinsopp has documented the use of the book of Isaiah in Second Temple Jewish writings.[[94]](#footnote-94) In this work he traces Qumran usage of “the Way” for their community and he makes conventional connections with early Christian usage in Acts.

And when these have become a community in Israel in compliance with these arrangements they are to be segregated from within the dwelling of the men of sin to walk in the desert in order to open there his path. As it is written: “In the desert prepare the way of the Lord, straighten in the steppe a roadway for our God”. This is the study of the Law wh[i]ch he commanded through the hand of Moses, in order to act in compliance with all that has been revealed from age to age, and according to what the prophets have revealed through his holy spirit. 1QS 8, 12-16,[[95]](#footnote-95) cf. 1QS 9, 19-20

The Qumran community physically relocated to the desert of Judea in order to practise “the way” based on a true interpretation of the Law and the Prophets. The early Christian community was likewise “the Way”, but in the land and in the Diaspora.

**Blogroll Jan-Apr 2009**

On the ASOR blog (American Schools of Oriental Research, January), Jodi Magness, best known for her Qumran archaeology, exchanges comments with Geoff Hudson on the “siege wall” around Masada. Hudson’s comments are interesting in that he argues against the older view that the wall is a siege wall built by the Romans. He argues:

…outer defensive wall that was a part of the original defensive system of Masada. The wall had integral accommodation for defending troops. These were obviously not used by the Roman soldiers who chose to build their own camps. The implication is that when Masada was taken, the defensive wall was in a state of disrepair and could not be used subsequently by the Romans for accommodation. The circumvallation was some two miles long - two months was hardly sufficient time to build such a wall. In addition on the southern side, the wall is along the top of a precipice which already formed a natural barrier to prevent the escape of defenders. Thus along the precipice, the purpose of the wall was to ward-off attackers from the south.

Approximately three thousand soldiers would have been required to defend a two mile long wall. Thus a small number of defenders at the wall would have been quickly driven back to the fortress where there was a low double wall at the summit approximately one mile long. Again a one mile long low wall would have been difficult to defend with a small number of defenders. Masada was taken quickly in a commando type of attack with ladders. As Jodi Magness has acknowledged, no heavy siege weapons were used at Masada. There was no siege. The Roman camps were there as a part of the later Roman defences for the area and to prevent further occupation of the fortress.

**Discussion: Dating Obadiah**

There are six undated prophets in the Minor Prophets (Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Malachi). Scholars argue about their dates and often reach a consensus. Obadiah is usually dated to just before or just after the sack of Jerusalem (587). In this discussion, we present this consensus and an alternative eighth century dating.

# Dating Obadiah

**T. Gaston**

**Introduction**

The book of Obadiah carries no dateline (e.g. ‘in xth year of…’), nor does it bear the name of any king (cf. Hos 1:1; Amos 1:1; etc.). There is no biographical information about the prophet, save the name ‘Obadiah’, and so he cannot be identified with any known historical figure.[[96]](#footnote-96) External evidence for the date of Obadiah is sparse. It is possible that Obadiah’s position in the canon, amongst the pre-exilic prophets, may form an early witness to the date of book. Yet it is known that the order of the Minor Prophets was quite fluid. In any case, there is no particular reason to suppose that the Minor Prophets were ordered chronologically, rather than, say, thematically, therefore most commentators date the book according to internal evidence.

Amongst the older commentaries there is to be found a wide spectrum of opinion regarding the date of Obadiah as commentators select various invasions of Israel/Judah as the context of the prophecy. The dates range from the sack of Jerusalem by Shishak in the reign of Rehoboam (c.970; 1 Kgs 14:25-6) to the capture of Jerusalem by Ptolemy Lagus (c.301).[[97]](#footnote-97) Ewald proposed the restoration of the city of Elath by Rezin of Syria to Edom (2 Chron 28:17), Delitzsch and Keil favoured the incursion of the Philistines and Arabians (c.850; 2 Chron 21:16f), whilst Meyrick, Kuenen and Farrar selected the conquest of Nebuchadnezzar (c.587).[[98]](#footnote-98) Both E. B. Pusey and A. F. Kirkpatrick favoured the Philistine-Arabian invasion, arguing that vv. 1-9 is the source for Jeremiah 49.[[99]](#footnote-99) Wellhausen dated the book to 5thc, assuming that it must have been written after the Edomites had been expelled from their homeland.[[100]](#footnote-100)

In modern commentaries a consensus has formed around the Babylonian invasion as the most likely context for Obadiah.[[101]](#footnote-101) Pusey’s argument about vv. 1-9 being a source for Jeremiah 49 is no longer considered decisive since many believe that both are based upon some third source. The issue of date, therefore, is now determined almost entirely on whether the words of Obadiah better fit the aftermath of the Babylonian invasion of Judah.

The question of dating is complicated by the assertions of many critical scholars that certain parts of the book are later additions. The most common approach is to divide the book, identifying vv. 15-21 as an “appendix”, written to generalize Obadiah’s words and give them a universal application (following Wellhausen). One piece of evidence that is cited for dividing the book[[102]](#footnote-102) is the mention of ‘Sepharad’ (=Sardis, v. 20), which is taken to betray a later date for vv. 15-21 (or vv. 10-21) as Sardis was not a region of either the Assyrian or Babylonian empires, but was a conquest of the Persians.

Our consideration of the date of Obadiah here will focus upon choosing between the various invasions of Israel/Judah to identify the one that suits Obadiah’s words. Lastly, we will attempt to reconstruct the events that led to the destruction of Edom, since this event is the *terminus ad quem* (latest possible dating) for the book.

**Invasion of Israel**

Vv. 10-14 describes in dramatic terms an invasion of Judah and particularly the conquest and destruction of Jerusalem. The first two verses (vv. 10-11) are straightforward, but the change of tense (or verbal aspect) in vv. 12-14 leaves many commentators perplexed. In these verses the verbs are imperfect imperatives,[[103]](#footnote-103) translated by many modern versions “do not …” (e.g. NASB, ESV) in contrast to the NKJV:

But do not gloat over the day of your brother in the day of his misfortune; do not rejoice over the people of Judah in the day of their ruin; do not boast in the day of distress. Do not enter the gate of my people in the day of their calamity; do not gloat over his disaster in the day of his calamity; do not loot his wealth in the day of his calamity. Do not stand at the crossroads to cut off his fugitives; do not hand over his survivors in the day of distress. [ESV]

But you should not have gazed on the day of your brother in the day of his captivity; nor should you have rejoiced over the children of Judah in the day of their destruction; nor should you have spoken proudly in the day of distress. You should not have entered the gate of My people in the day of their calamity. Indeed, you should not have gazed on their affliction in the day of their calamity, nor laid hands on their substance in the day of their calamity. You should not have stood at the crossroads to cut off those among them who escaped; nor should you have delivered up those among them who remained in the day of distress. [NKJV]

Pusey interprets the imperfect imperatives as signifying that the Edomite invasion of Judah had not yet taken place and therefore takes vv. 12-14 as a prophecy of the Babylonian invasion:

According to the only meaning, then, which the words bear, Edom had not yet committed the sin against which Obadiah warns him, and so Jerusalem was not yet destroyed, when the prophet wrote…no day was the day of utter destruction to Jerusalem, except that of its capture by Nebuchadnezzar.[[104]](#footnote-104)

Nevertheless most modern commentators interpret vv. 12-14 as referring to past action because it is sandwiched by clauses in the past tense (“you were like one of them” v. 11 (RSV); “as you have done” v. 15 (RSV)).[[105]](#footnote-105)

On the day that you stood aloof, on the day that strangers carried off his wealth, and foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem, you were like one of them…

… For the day of the Lord draws near on all the nations. As you have done, it will be done to you. Your dealings will return on your own head.

It would certainly seem strange if some future event were referred to in the midst of diatribe about past transgressions; hence translators render the Hebrew as “you should not have”. This is how the LXX rendered its Hebrew using aorist subjunctives:

And thou shouldest not have looked on the day of thy brother in the day of strangers; nor shouldest thou have rejoiced against the children of Judah in the day of their destruction; neither shouldest thou have boasted in the day of *their* affliction. Obad 1:12 (LXX)

It is to be remembered that vv. 12-14 are not in the future tense and do not necessarily refer to future actions. If vv. 12-14 were intended as a warning we could reasonably expect the writer to use the jussive and not the imperfect imperative (*pace* Pusey). The imperfect imperative implies absolute (and thus, timeless) prohibition. It seems probable therefore that the change of tense is an intentional rhetorical device by the author to emphasize Edom’s moral responsibility to his brother.

Obadiah describes an attack on Jerusalem with these specific features:

* Penetration of the city gates (vv. 11, 13), apparently by force
* Looting (vv. 11, 13)
* Destruction and ruin of the city (v. 12)
* The inhabitants slain or made fugitives (v. 14)

Edom’s part in these events is described sometimes in terms of an onlooker (vv. 11-12), but also as an active participant in ‘violence’ (v. 10), marching “through the gates” (v. 13), seizing wealth (v. 13) and cutting down those who escaped (v. 14). The Edomites violence against Jerusalem is described vividly as drinking upon the ‘holy hill’ (v. 16). When attempting to identify the situation of the words, we will need to find an attack upon Jerusalem that matches both the specifics details and the dramatic tone, and, most importantly, that involved Edom.

From the time of David onwards, Jerusalem endured many onslaughts:

1. In the fifth year of Rehoboam Shishak of Egypt plundered the Temple and the royal palace (1 Kgs 14:25f)
2. In Jehoram’s reign the palace was again plundered by the Philistines and Arabs (2 Chron 21:16-17).
3. A war between Amaziah and Jehoash, king of Israel, led to the destruction of part of the wall and further looting of the Temple (2 Kgs 14:11-14).
4. In the time of Ahaz, Jerusalem was again attacked by the combined armies of Syria and Israel, but withstood and was not penetrated (2 Kgs 16:6).
5. The armies of Sennacherib laid siege to Jerusalem but did not penetrate it (701 B.C.E.; 2 Kgs 18-19).
6. Nebuchadnezzar came against Jerusalem on several occasions, probably in 605 and certainly in 597 taking captives. Finally in 587 the city and Temple were destroyed by the Babylonian army.

The question is in which, if any, of these onslaughts were Edomites involved. The first (A) must be dispensed with since Edom was in subjection to Israel/Judah from the reign of David till the reign of Jehoram (2 Sam 8:13-14; 2 Kgs 8:20-22).[[106]](#footnote-106) (C) is also unlikely since prior to invasion of Jehoash Amaziah had captured Sela (capital of Edom) and slaughtered 10,000 of their fighting men (1Kgs 14:7-10).

We know little of the Philistine-Arab invasion (B); it is described in two verses in Chronicles and is not mentioned in Kings. The surrender of Jerusalem is implied; the treasures from the palace are taken and the sons and wives of Jehoram taken captive (2 Chron 21:17). Yet even were this sufficient to merit the words of Obadiah, the involvement of Edom in this skirmish seems unlikely: first, Edom is not mentioned; secondly, Edom had only recently revolted against Judah (2 Kgs 8:20-22; 2 Chron 21:8-10).

The Edomites are mentioned in the account of the Syro-Ephraimite crisis during the reign of Ahaz as the beneficiaries (D), gaining the town of Elath after the Syrians had driven away the Judahite inhabitants (2 Kgs 16:5-6). However, this account stresses that the Syrian invaders were not able to penetrate Jerusalem, contrary to Obadiah’s words. The Chronicles account also mentions an invasion by the Edomites during the reign of Ahaz. It is recorded that the Edomites took captives and Ahaz was forced to ask for assistance from the King of Assyria (2 Chron 28:16-17); no attack on Jerusalem is mentioned.

Since Edom is listed in Assyria’s tribute list from after Tiglath-Pileser III’s campaign against Philistia in 734,[[107]](#footnote-107) it is just possible that the Edomites were allied to Sennacherib when he besieged Jerusalem (E). Nevertheless, we know that Sennacherib failed in his attempt to capture Jerusalem and no looting or captivity occurred.

The Babylonian invasion of Judah (c.587) is the **only time** in Israel’s history when the Edomites are associated with a penetration of Jerusalem. Psalm 137, in its lament for Zion, petitions the Lord to remember Edom for its part:

Remember, O Lord, against the Edomites the day of Jerusalem, how they said, “Lay it bare, lay it bare, down to its foundations”. Ps 137:7 (ESV)

1 Esdras 4:45 accuses the Edomites of destroying the Temple:

You have vowed to build up the Temple, which the Edomites burned when Judah was made desolate by the Babylonians.

This evidence of the involvement of the Edomites has been called into question by some commentators. For instance, R. J. Coggins doubts whether 1 Esd 4:45 is based on any independent historical tradition, viewing it as an interpretation based upon Ps 137:7 and Obadiah.[[108]](#footnote-108) Given that 1 Esdras was probably written at a time of Jewish aggression against the Idumeans dwelling in the south, it is understandable that the writer would have wished to emphasize (and exaggerate?) the extent of Edom’s previous transgressions. Also, Ps 137:7 only describes Edom as a passive observer and does not mention any acts of aggression against Judah.

It should be noted that Edom’s participation in 587 is not mentioned in either the Babylonian or Jewish accounts of the fall of Jerusalem. Edom appears to have been friendly to Judah (Jer 27:2-3) and Edom is not listed amongst Nebuchadnezzar’s allies in 2 Kgs 24:2. In Jer 40:11-2 it is implied that Jewish refugees from the Babylonian invasion had settled in Edom and were free to return when Gedaliah was appointed governor, which is a difference to Obadiah’s words that Edom cut off the fugitives and delivered them up. Also, the archeological evidence is sporadic and difficult to interpret. There is some evidence of Edomite penetration into southern Judah in the latter part of the sixth century B.C.E., which J. Renkema interpreted as evidence of Edomite aggression around 587.[[109]](#footnote-109) It is more likely that this indicates an Edomite migration into Judah prompted by occupation of their homeland by the Nabataeans, an Arabian tribe.[[110]](#footnote-110)

Nevertheless, despite the absence of more explicit mention, the involvement of Edom in the Babylonian invasion seems probable. The mention of the Edomites in a psalm criticizing the Babylonian invasion would be bizarre if they had not played some part in that event. If it proves nothing else, 1 Esd 4:45 demonstrates a long-standing association of the Edomites with the destruction of Jerusalem in the memory of the Jews. It is also perfectly reasonable that Edom should have participated, either as ally or opportunist, in Judah’s downfall. Renkema states,

It is politically unlikely that Edom did not take advantage of this opportunity to broaden its sphere of influence.[[111]](#footnote-111)

Ezekiel seems to confirm the Edomites’ involvement, criticizing them for giving over “the people of Israel to the power of the sword at the time of their calamity, at the time of their final punishment” (Ezek 35:5).

Though Obadiah does use different language than Ezekiel (there are no intertextual links), he describes the crisis in the gravest terms: “the day of his misfortune … the day of ruin … the day of distress” (v. 12), “the day of calamity” (three times; v. 13), “the day of distress” (v. 14). Such terminology does not fit with the looting of previous invasions (A-C) but implies an event of far greater impact: the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the kingdom of Judah (v. 12).

The reference to the captivity (v. 20; cf. vv. 11, 14) makes sense against this interpretation:

The **exiles of this host of the people of Israel** shall possess the land of the Canaanites as far as Zarephath, and the **exiles of Jerusalem** who are in Sepharad shall possess the cities of the Negeb. [ESV]

There was no significant captivity before the Assyrians carried away the northern kingdom. In v. 20, the prophet refers to both the exiles of “the people of Israel” and of “Jerusalem”. Now while it is conceivable that both references are prophetic, these verses would seem to have little relevance prior to both captivities.[[112]](#footnote-112) The fact that Obadiah is predicting the return of the exiles of Jerusalem (to the cities of the Negeb) strongly implies that he is speaking after their exile (not before).

**Obadiah and Jeremiah**

It is well known that there are strong parallels between Obadiah and Jeremiah 49, and it is clear that they have a common topic. Even though Jeremiah 49 can be reliably dated to the years leading up to the Babylonian invasion (c. 605; cf. Jer 45:1), it cannot be conclusively shown that Obadiah is dependent on Jeremiah 49, thereby making Obadiah a later book. However, for the purposes of our argument it is sufficient to show that the two texts share a common background topic—the downfall of Judah. The main intertextual links are set out in the table below:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Obadiah (ESV)** | **Jeremiah 49 (ESV)** |
| v.1 Thus says the Lord God concerning Edom, We have heard a report from the Lord and a messenger has been sent among the nations: “Rise up! Let us rise against her for battle!” | v.7 Concerning Edom. Thus says the Lord of hosts.  v.14 I have heard a message from the Lord, An envoy was sent to the nations to say, “Assemble yourselves to attack it! Rise up for battle!” |
| v.2 Behold, I will make you small among the nations…you shall be utterly despised… | v.15 Now I will make you small among the nations…despised among men. |
| v.3 The pride of your heart has deceived you…you who live in the clefts of the rock, in your lofty dwelling… | v.16 …and the pride of your heart have deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rocks, who occupy the heights of the hill… |
| v.4 …though your nest is set among the stars, from there I will bring you down, declares the Lord. | v.16 Though you build your nest as high as the eagle's, from there I will bring you down," declares the Lord. |
| v.5 Ifthieves came to you, if plunderers came by night—how you have been destroyed!—would they not steal only enough for themselves? If grape gatherers came to you, would they not leave gleanings? | v.9 If thieves came during the night, would they not steal only as much as they wanted?  If grape pickers came to you, would they not leave a few grapes? |
| v.6 How Esau has been pillaged, his treasures sought out! | v.10 But I have stripped Esau bare; I have uncovered his hiding places, and he is not able to conceal himself. His children are destroyed, and his brothers, and his neighbors; and he is no more. |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Obadiah (ESV)** | **Jeremiah 49 (ESV)** |
| v.7 …you have no understanding…  v.8 Will I not on that day, declares the Lord, destroy the wise men out of Edom, and understanding of Mount Esau? | v.7 Is wisdom no more in Teman? Has counsel perished from the prudent? Has their wisdom vanished? |
| v.9 And your might men shall be dismayed, O Teman, so that every man from Mount Esau will be cut off by slaughter. | v.10 His descendants are plundered, his brethren and his neighbours, and he is more. |
| v.16 For as you have drunk on my holy mountain, so all the nations shall drink continually; they shall drink and swallow, and shall be as though they had never been | v.12 For thus says the Lord: If those who did not deserve to drink the cup must drink it, will you go unpunished? You shall not go unpunished, but you must drink |
| v.21 Saviors shall go up to Mount Zion to rule Mount Esau, and the kingdom shall be the Lord’s | v.19 And I will appoint over her whomever I choose. For who is like me? Who will summon me? What shepherd can stand before me? |

The judgments upon Edom in Jeremiah 49 are set against the background of Judah’s troubles with the Babylonians; similarly, we should read Obadiah against the same background.

We would in fact propose that Obadiah does borrow phraseology from Jeremiah and builds his prophecy around key themes of the passage. Yet Obadiah does not simply regurgitate Jeremiah’s prophecy, he is creative and turns this old words to a new purpose. Several sections in Obadiah’s prophecy find no parallel in Jeremiah 49, specifically: the description of Edom’s sin (vv. 10-14), the introduction of the Day of the Lord (v. 15) and the description of Israel’s victory and distribution of the land (vv. 18-20). These additions add depth, making the judgment of Edom retributive on the one hand and on the other providing an eschatological hope to his listeners.

Several commentators note that it is peculiar that Obadiah does not mention the destruction of the Temple if he is writing directly after the fall of Jerusalem.[[113]](#footnote-113) One response to this observation is that Obadiah would have regarded the destruction of the Temple as the work of the Lord, not of the Edomites.[[114]](#footnote-114) More importantly, Obadiah is focused on the crimes of Edom, not Babylon, and there is no evidence except the disputed reference in 1 Esd 4:45 that the Edomites were involved in the destruction of the Temple. Obadiah’s words are concerned with the human tragedy and Edom’s failure to respect its duty as a brother, rather than the spiritual tragedy. In any case, at twenty-one verses, Obadiah is too short for any omission to be given significant weight.

**The Destruction of Edom**

The evidence we have discussed so far indicates that Obadiah was writing after the destruction of Jerusalem (c.587), but how long after? Did Obadiah write shortly after the events, or many centuries later? Since Obadiah predicts the destruction of Edom, this event is the *terminus ad quem* (latest possible dating) for the book. We will now attempt to date that event.

The little we know of the land of Edom in the centuries following the fall of Jerusalem demonstrates that Obadiah’s predictions of doom upon Edom were fulfilled. The writings of *Diodorus Siculus* indicate that by 312 B.C.E. the land of Edom was occupied by Nabataeans, an Arabian tribe.[[115]](#footnote-115) The books of the Maccabees and Josephus record that by the time of the Maccabees the Edomites (named ‘Idumeans’) were dwelling in southern Judea.[[116]](#footnote-116) The Idumeans were later subdued and integrated amongst the Jews. The initial dispossession of the Edomites by the Nabataeans seems to be the primary fulfillment of Obadiah’s words (“your allies have driven you to your border” v. 7), however the later fate of the Idumeans, disappearing from the page of history, completes the judgment determined (v. 10).

Though we know little about the destruction of Edom or the Nabataean expansion into region, we can give a probable reconstruction of these events. The excavations at Ezion-Geber indicate the presence of Edomites to the mid-sixth century, revealing a seal (c.600-550) and an ostracon (c.550-500) each bearing Edomites names.[[117]](#footnote-117) We also find to the continued reference to the nation of Edom in the OT books of this period (Lam 4:21-22; Ezek 25:12-14; Dan 11:41). By the time of Malachi the destruction of Edom is past (Mal 1:1-5); this is corroborated by the discovery of Arabic names at Ezion-Geber dating from the fifth century.[[118]](#footnote-118) The relevant tablet of the Babylonian Chronicle, known as the *Nabonidus Chronicle,* though damaged, reveals that it was probably Nabonidus who came against Edom on his way to Teima (c.550). The excavations of Buseira, Tawilan and Tell el-Kheleifh reveal that they were destroyed in the mid-sixth century, corroborating the account of the Chronicle.[[119]](#footnote-119) That the Babylonians were the source of Edom’s destruction corresponds with Obadiah’s prediction that Edom’s allies would be against her (v. 7).

The reason for the Babylonian campaign against Edom is unclear, though it is possible that, like the kings of Judah, the kings of Edom attempted to rebel against their overlords. It is no longer thought that Nabonidus’ extended residence in Teima was for spiritual solitude. It is likely that Nabonidus sought to secure the trade routes of north Arabia to gain wealth for Babylon.[[120]](#footnote-120) The campaign against Edom may be explained as a security measure to provide stability in the region. It is certainly probable that the Babylonian military presence in northern Arabia disposed the Nabataeans and prompted them to find a new home in the land of Edom, conveniently weakened by the Babylonians.[[121]](#footnote-121)

The remnant of the people of Edom appears to have migrated westward into southern Judah under pressure from the Nabataeans. It is likely that some Edomites remained in Edom and were integrated with the Nabataeans, who appear to have adopted some Edomite customs and religious practices. In the second century B.C.E. the Edomites who had migrated into southern Palestine were defeated Judas Maccabaeus[[122]](#footnote-122) and again subdued by Hyrcanus.[[123]](#footnote-123) Josephus records that after this later defeat, the remaining Edomites (Idumeans) were forcibly converted to Judaism and integrated into Jewish society. By the time of Jesus there was little differential between the Jews and Idumeans. The last historical mention we have of the Edomites is Herod, king of Judea, was called an Idumean.[[124]](#footnote-124)

**Conclusion**

The destruction of Edom and the initial fulfillment of Obadiah’s prophecy may be cautiously dated to c.550 B.C.E. If this event is to have relevance as retribution, Obadiah must be referring to Edom’s *latest* crime. The evidence for Edom’s involvement in the destruction of Jerusalem is sparse but sufficient to establish the association. This is in contrast to the alternative penetrations of Jerusalem, for which there is little or no evidence of Edom’s involvement, and in any case do not fit the tone of Obadiah’s words.

Other clues to the dating are scarce and difficult to interpret. If Obadiah’s dependence upon Jeremiah 49 is substantiated then this would add weight to the sixth century date. More significant is the reference to the captivity of Jerusalem (v. 20), which would seem to rule out any date prior to 605 B.C.E.

In conclusion, we may cautiously date the book of Obadiah to 587-550 B.C.E., that is, in the immediate aftermath of the Babylonian invasion of Judah.

# An Eighth Century Obadiah

**Andrew Perry**

**Introduction**

While Obadiah has no dateable information in its superscription, the consensus of scholars is that the work is *just* exilic, or on the cusp of the exile, and partly a reflection upon Edom’s involvement in the sack of Jerusalem in 587.[[125]](#footnote-125) A full discussion of the dating of Obadiah is beyond the scope of this article. Here we will delineate an **eighth century reading** and contrast it with the consensus “Babylonian” reading.

**Challenging the Consensus**

The main verses that are taken to support a sixth century reading of Obadiah are vv. 10-14, and our contention is that they have been badly misunderstood by commentators for the following reasons:

1) Edom has done violence to Judah (v. 10) for which they will be destroyed. The word for “violence” is common (smx) but the expression “because of the violence” (smxm) is rare (3x) and is shared between Joel and Obadiah (Joel 3:19). In addition, Obadiah goes onto use the expression “children of Judah” (v. 12, hdwhy ynb) which is rare in the Prophets (5x) and occurs twice in Joel (Joel 3:8, 19). This verbal linkage allows the suggestion that Joel is talking about the same crime committed by Edom, and that therefore the violence was done *in Edom* and it was not the violence of war, but the violence of shedding innocent blood—the blood of civilian victims (e.g. Ps 106:38; Prov 6:17; Jer 7:6).

Everyone in Edom was to be “cut off by slaughter” (KJV, RSV[[126]](#footnote-126)) and the reason given is “for violence against Jacob” (v. 10):

...to the end that every one of the mount of Esau may be cut off by slaughter. For violence against thy brother Jacob...thou shalt be cut off for ever. Obad vv. 9-10 (KJV revised)

The repetition of “cut off” (trk) in vv. 9-10 as an *inclusio* ties these two verses together and marks out v. 11 as a separate unit. There are certainly occasions in the eighth century when Edom might have committed this crime of shedding innocent blood, chief of which would be their attacks in the 730s when they took captives from Judah (2 Chron 28:17), or when they received captives from the Philistines (Amos 1:6, 9).

2) The text of v. 11 is marked off from vv. 9-10 because of the change of topic. Whereas vv. 9-10 centre on Edom’s violence, v. 11 is about Edom standing aloof from the plunder of Jerusalem.[[127]](#footnote-127) Similarly, v. 11 is separated from vv. 12-14 by a sharp change in mood. This change is masked in the KJV and RSV but brought out by the NASB:

On the day that you stood aloof, on the day that strangers carried off his wealth, and foreigners entered his gate and cast lots for Jerusalem—you too were as one of them. Obad v. 11 (NASB)

Do not gloat over your brother's day, the day of his misfortune. And do not rejoice over the sons of Judah in the day of their destruction; Yes, do not boast in the day of *their* distress. 13 Do not enter the gate of my people in the day of their disaster. Yes, you, do not gloat over their calamity in the day of their disaster. And do not loot their wealth in the day of their disaster. 14 Do not stand at the fork of the road to cut down their fugitives; and do not imprison their survivors in the day of their distress. Obad v. 12-14 (NASB)

This change of mood is marked from v. 11 to vv. 12-14, and it has caused commentators to change the normal rendering of the syntax in vv. 12-14 to a past indicative tense and mood consistent with v. 11. J. Barton observes of the verbal forms in vv. 12-14 that “the obvious way to take them is as imperative imperfects”,[[128]](#footnote-128) which is how the NASB renders the verses. This is consistent with the use of the particle adverb la and the imperfect verb everywhere else in Hebrew to convey the jussive.[[129]](#footnote-129) This is not an uncommon syntactical combination and there are dozens of examples where translations render the form as an imperative. Barton’s advocacy of the past indicative tense and mood is based on nothing more than the “odd effect”[[130]](#footnote-130) of the prophecy referring to what the Edomites have done (?!) in vv. 1-11 and then switching to an imperative. On this basis, the RSV has,

But you should not have gloated over the day of your brother in the day of his misfortune; you should not have rejoiced over the people of Judah in the day of their ruin; you should not have boasted in the day of distress. 13 You should not have entered the gate of my people in the day of his calamity; you should not have gloated over his disaster in the day of his calamity; you should not have looted his goods in the day of his calamity. 14 You should not have stood at the parting of the ways to cut off his fugitives; you should not have delivered up his survivors in the day of distress. Obad vv. 12-14 (RSV)

It is a mistake to overturn a common syntactical pattern[[131]](#footnote-131) because of a lack of understanding on the part of a commentator/translator in how the thought of a text flows from point to point. We conclude therefore that the NASB is correct to maintain the Hebrew syntax as imperatives. The consequence of this is that the subject-matter of v. 11 is different to that of vv. 12-14, so that *both* cannot refer to the Babylonian sack of Jerusalem in 587.

The NASB would allow a date for Obadiah before 587, in which case vv. 12-14 become a warning in general terms to Edom not to take advantage of Judah’s punishment and v. 11 references an earlier injustice on the part of Edom. The RSV (incorrectly) harmonizes the verbal mood and tense across vv. 11-14 and thereby avoids this implication. However, commentators who follow this way of rendering the Hebrew have Obadiah writing *after* the sack of Jerusalem, and in this case, it is surprising that the prophet makes no reference to the destruction of the city or temple or to the deportation of the people to Babylon, and this casts doubt on the Babylonian interpretation. In an eighth century reading (following the NASB), it is not difficult to identify an occasion when Obadiah might have warned Edom (not to stand by and watch Judah’s downfall since this was threatened by Assyria in the 730s, 720s and in 701.

3) Obadiah v. 11 references a prior historical act of hostility, but vv. 1-10 anticipates (and concludes) a forthcoming war with Edom. This is clear from v. 1 which states that a “report” (h[wmv) has been heard, a term that is indicative of military movement (e.g. Isa 28:19; 37:7; Jer 10:22; Ezek 7:26).

Thus says the Lord God concerning Edom: We have heard tidings from the Lord, and a messenger has been sent among the nations: “Rise up! Let us rise against her for battle!” Obad v. 1 (RSV)

Contrary to Barton,[[132]](#footnote-132) who reflects a common view that v. 1 is about nations gathering against Edom, this messenger is Edom’s messenger gathering the nations round about to battle against Zion.[[133]](#footnote-133) Against this opening declaration, the oracle of vv. 2-4 can be rendered as in the KJV with its perfect verbs expressing a fact:

Behold, I have made thee small among the heathen: thou art greatly despised. The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee, thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation *is* high; that saith in his heart, Who shall bring me down to the ground? Though thou exalt *thyself* as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down, saith the Lord. Obad vv. 2-4 (KJV)

Edom had designs on Zion, but God had made her a small people and of no account; if they magnified themselves and sought to take Jerusalem, they would be brought down to the ground. The anticipation of a war at this point, prosecuted by Edom, is incompatible with a Babylonian reading.

3) The attempt at forging an alliance and then attacking Jerusalem comes to an end at the border when treachery within the alliance brings Edom’s designs to an end (v. 7). The “wisdom” and the “political understanding” of the Edomite counsellors is shown to be disastrous. The so-called allies had turned against Edom and left nothing—they were “cut off” to such an extent that their state was as if robbers had left nothing behind in a house (v. 5). The reason for all this was their “violence” against their brother Jacob (v. 10).[[134]](#footnote-134) The forthcoming war of vv. 1-4 is averted by the repetition of Jehoshaphat’s “victory” over a similar Edomite alliance that also fell to internecine strife (vv. 5-10, cf. 2 Chronicles 20).

4) Obadiah vv. 10-14 is usually taken to be the sack of Jerusalem in 587.[[135]](#footnote-135) An older commentary view is that this is a reference to Shishak’s subjugation of Jerusalem in the days of Rehoboam (1 Kgs 14:25-28).[[136]](#footnote-136) It has also been related to the Philistine and Arabian attack on Jerusalem in the reign of Jehoram (2 Chron 21:16-17),[[137]](#footnote-137) and the Syro-Ephraimite Crisis.[[138]](#footnote-138) On any interpretation, Edom is assigned an unhelpful largely passive role in which she takes delight in Judah’s downfall (cf. Ps 137:7; Lam 5:9). However, there are a number of objections to the Babylonian interpretation:

i) First, the interpretation does not respect the divisions between Obadiah’s oracle units—vv. 5-10, v. 11 and vv. 12-14.

ii) Secondly, there is extensive quotation of Obad vv. 1-8 in Jeremiah 49,[[139]](#footnote-139) but crucially, vv. 10-14 is not quoted. This is surprising if these verses are about the capture of Jerusalem in 587 and Jeremiah has Obadiah available for his use. One would have expected these verses to have been used by Jeremiah in his oracles about 587. This lack of mention has led scholars to propose that Obadiah is a composite work that includes an earlier prophet’s words (e.g. vv. 1-9, 17-18), to which Jeremiah had access, along with the work of an exilic or post-exilic prophet which post-dates Jeremiah.[[140]](#footnote-140)

iii) Third, if Obadiah is taken to be a unified record[[141]](#footnote-141) from one prophet, certain statements do not easily fit the Babylonian Captivity and its aftermath. First, there is the positive assurance of deliverance (not capture) in Zion (v. 17; Joel 2:32); secondly, there was to be “holiness” in Zion, a hope indicative of the continuing presence of the temple and/or the Spirit (v. 17; Joel 2:28-29; 3:17); thirdly, there is an expectation of vengeance meted out by Judah upon Edom (v. 18; cf. Joel 3:19); and fourthly, there is confidence in the enlargement of Judah and Benjamin, and a return of captives from the West (not East, vv. 19-20). This difficulty has led commentators to read vv. 17-21 in long-distance terms, as an expression of what will happen in the “last days”.[[142]](#footnote-142) The problem with this *ad hoc* suggestion is that it is difficult to see how such a reading would have been relevant or of value to Obadiah’s audience and it looks like an attempt to avoid evidence that goes against the Babylonian reading. Furthermore, the details of geography are very specific as if to require an immediate relevance to Judah (Zarephath; Sepharad) rather than an application in the “last days”.

iv) Fourthly, the return of captives is from the West rather than the East as in the case of the Babylonian Captivity (2 Chron 36:20; Ezra 2:1). L. C. Allen remarks, “One might have expected a reference to Babylon as the domicile of Jewish exiles, but instead a mysterious *Sepharad* is named”.[[143]](#footnote-143) Allen advocates Sardis as the identity of Sepharad principally on the grounds of an Aramaic bilingual inscription which has the Aramaic *sprd* as the name of Sardis. If this is correct, Sardis is to the north and east in Asia Minor. Pusey observes that such a location would be consistent with slave-trading.[[144]](#footnote-144) Such a detail harmonizes with Joel’s record of the Ionians’ 8c. involvement in slave-trading with the Phoenician and Philistine coastal cities (Joel 3:4, 6); the location of Sardis near to the centre of Ionian trade is an undesigned coincidence between Joel and Obadiah. It is noteworthy that these specifics in the prophecy tell against a “last days” interpretation of the later verses. Moreover, the focus then shifts to Judah and Benjamin possessing land to the north and the south rather than any last days’ return that would encompass all the tribes of Israel.

v) The direct involvement of Edom in the sack of Jerusalem is a hypothesis. The evidence of Ps 137:7 and Lam 5:9 is that they “watched” the attack and operated in the desert harrying refugees. In the record of Kings and Chronicles, Chaldeans, Arameans, Moabites and Ammonites joined in the attack on Jerusalem (2 Kgs 24:2; Jer 35:11); Edom is not mentioned, which one would have expected in a list of Judah’s local enemies if Obadiah was about the prior sack of Jerusalem.

For these reasons, (i)-(v), we reject the Babylonian interpretation. This does not settle a date for Obadiah and the historical reference of v. 11 remains uncertain. Suggestions based on Shishak’s entry into Jerusalem (1 Kgs 14:25-26) or that of the Arabians and Philistines (2 Chron 21:16-17) are possible[[145]](#footnote-145) but they beg the question of how long after these events Obadiah prophesied. If Obadiah was a near contemporary to either event (925, 840), the question can be raised as to why the book is not first in any order of the Minor Prophets.

5) The scope of v. 11 does not obviously suggest the *sack* of a city: there is no description of the ruination of the city, walls buildings and temple; there is no language of deportation. The Edomites are not accused of taking delight in these common aspects of conquest. In contrast, they *are* accused of this attitude by the Psalmist in response to the events of 587,

Remember, O Lord, against the sons of Edom The day of Jerusalem, Who said, “Raze it, raze it to its very foundation.” Ps 137:7 (NASB) cf. Lam 5:9

The descriptions in v. 11 also fit a situation where Jerusalem *surrendered* to a foreign army leaving the apparatus of the state and the infrastructure of the city intact. This was evidently the case in the reign of Rehoboam (Shishak) and Jehoram (Arabians, Philistines). On these occasions, the wealth of the city is taken by the hostile force, but the monarchy and the state continue to function.

Ezekiel notes another attitude on the part of Edom:

The word of the Lord came to me: 2 "Son of man, set your face against Mount Seir, and prophesy against it, 3 and say to it, Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I am against you, Mount Seir, and I will stretch out my hand against you, and I will make you a desolation and a waste. 4 I will lay your cities waste, and you shall become a desolation; and you shall know that I am the Lord. 5 Because you cherished perpetual enmity, and gave over the people of Israel to the power of the sword at the time of their calamity, at the time of their final punishment… Ezek 35:1-5 (RSV)

Here, the invective is that the cities of Mount Seir would be laid waste because they had “cherished perpetual enmity” and handed Israel over to the Babylonians during the final days of the monarchy. This accusation against Edom is not the same as that expressed in Obadiah, and this suggests that Obadiah reflects a different occasion to that of Ezekiel.[[146]](#footnote-146) Moreover, Ezekiel notes Edom’s long memory and determination to wreak revenge for past treatment at the hand of Judah. This long memory could be reflected in an equal long memory on the part of Judah about Edom’s reciprocal treatment (Amos 1:9). In this case, Obadiah might well be remembering the behaviour of Edom during the reign of Jehoram and cite this in his own generation.[[147]](#footnote-147)

6) Edom’s role is one of non-involvement according to Obad v. 11. They “stand aloof” (v. 11, RSV, NASB) while “strangers” carry away the wealth (v. 11, lyx, RSV, NASB) of the city. They are not part of the forces of the foreign army that has assailed Jerusalem (“strangers”, Hos 8:7; Isa 1:7). Furthermore, the main complaint is the taking of wealth rather than any destruction of Jerusalem. This fits the leading characteristic that Kings and Chronicles record for the Arabian and Philistine incursion:

And the Lord stirred up against Jehoram the anger of the Philistines and of the Arabs who are near the Ethiopians; 17 and they came up against Judah, and invaded it, and carried away all the possessions they found that belonged to the king's house, and also his sons and his wives, so that no son was left to him except Jehoahaz, his youngest son. 2 Chron 21:16-17 (RSV)

This event presupposes some sort of *surrender*[[148]](#footnote-148) on the part of the king, with its consequent tribute, as the Jerusalemites were able to anoint Ahaziah in place of Jehoram. The alliance against Judah would have “cast lots” for the disposal of slaves taken in the raid. If this is Obadiah’s historical reminiscence, the accusation against Edom is that they were “like one of them”—the raiders, but not “actually one of them”. The “casting of lots” that Obadiah mentions makes sense in the case of such an alliance, but not in the case of Babylon who are presented as the only enemy taking treasure and captives from Jerusalem to Babylon (2 Chron 36:7, 10, 18).

7) The warnings of vv. 12-14 are prefaced by the historical statement of v. 11: the purpose of v. 11 is to *justify* the warnings—Edom had a history of standing by and watching with satisfaction any downfall of Judah. In order for the warnings to have force, there must be a *prospect* of destruction (dba), distress (hrc), and calamity (dya) coming upon Judah. These terms are sufficiently common for any invasion or war that the prospect Obadiah foresees cannot be identified. For instance, distress is a feature of crises in Judah’s history in the 730s (Isa 8:22) as well as in 701/700 (Isa 33:2; 37:3; 63:9) and also in Josiah’s day (Zeph 1:15). The term “calamity” is used of the Babylonian Captivity (Jer 18:17; Ezek 35:5). If Obadiah’s warnings were delivered in the eighth century, they could certainly be re-used in the sixth century, but this consideration does not settle their date and provenance.

Obadiah’s warnings in vv. 12-14 are linked to the Day of the Lord,

For (yk) the Day of the Lord is near upon all the nations. As you have done, it shall be done to you, your deeds shall return on your own head. Obad v. 15 (RSV)

The effect of the “for” (yk) is to supply the backing for the warnings: Obadiah’s rhetoric is “Do not do this…for the Day of the Lord is near upon all nations”. Edom would be “rewarded” on that Day according to whether they had heeded Obadiah’s warnings. This logic excludes a date and provenance for Obadiah around 587, because at this time there was no prospect of there being a Day of the Lord for Edom and the nations. We can say that 587 was a Day of the Lord for Judah (cf. Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11), but Obadiah is about a Day of the Lord for all nations or as Joel puts it—the multitudes (Joel 3:14). Obadiah goes on in v. 16 to draw the comparison that as Edom had in the past drunk on God’s holy mountain, so too all nations would drink and “be as though they had not been” (KJV).

This prophetic rhetoric fits the Syro-Ephraimite Crisis and the arrival of Assyria into Syro-Palestine in 734. At this time they distressed Judah (2 Chron 28:20) and threatened the *status quo* in the entire Syro-Palestine land bridge. Edom was a confident aggressor at this time towards Judah and had “smitten them and carried away captives” at some time in the years leading up to 734 (2 Chron 28:17). It is a plausible hypothesis that Edom saw further opportunity for self-aggrandisement at the expense of Judah with the arrival of Assyria in the area or with the anti-Assyrian coalition of Syria and Northern Israel. Obadiah warns Edom against this course of behaviour and threatens a Day of the Lord for all nations—a prospect which he sees lying beyond the Assyrian occupation of the land.

8) Obadiah along with Joel affirms deliverance upon Mount Zion (v. 17, Joel 2:32). In the same oracle unit it is asserted that the “house of Joseph” and the “house of Jacob” would be a fire to the stubble of Esau (v. 18). As a result, the south (the Negeb) would possess Esau, the plain (the Shephelah) would possess the Philistines, and Benjamin would possess Gilead:

Those of the Negeb shall possess Mount Esau, and those of the Shephelah the land of the Philistines; they shall possess the land of Ephraim and the land of Samaria and Benjamin shall possess Gilead. Obad v. 19 (RSV)

These details fit an eighth century setting, but are difficult to fit around the events of 587. For this reason, commentators date vv. 17-21 (or some combination[[149]](#footnote-149) of vv. 15a, vv. 16-21) to a later writer than Obadiah.

With Assyria’s assault on Northern Israel in the 730s during the Syro-Ephraimite Crisis, and then in the 720s with the siege of Samaria and occupation of Northern Israel, many in the north migrated to the south for the safety of Judah. At this time the “house of Joseph” (Northern Israel, Amos 5:6) and the “house of Jacob” (Judah, Mic 2:7; 3:9) were “together” and could have wrought revenge upon Edom in Hezekiah’s reign. He removed the Assyrian garrison set up under Ahaz, campaigned against the Philistines, and addressed the “captivity” of Judah and Jerusalem (2 Kgs 18:7-8; 2 Chron 29:9). The south and the plain had been lost to the Philistines in the 730s (2 Chron 28:18); Obadiah prophesies their return in v. 19. It is not implausible to see Hezekiah’s campaigns extend to Edom at the same time.

The mention of Gilead is also explicable in the politics of the late eighth century. Gad along with Reuben occupied the eastern bank of the Jordan (Gilead) in the original tribal division of land (Num 32:1-5). During the period, 748-732, Menahem and Pekah were rival kings in Northern Israel. Assyrian records refer to Menahem as “of Samaria”[[150]](#footnote-150) which indicates his sphere of influence as Ephraim. Pekah’s sphere of influence would naturally fall on the east side of the Jordan, and his power base was most likely Gilead. In his usurpation of power, Menahem had assassinated Shallum who was from Jabesh-Gilead (2 Kgs 15:13-14), and in his turn, Pekah’s own coup against Menahem would be supported by Gileadites (2 Kgs 15:25). Pekah’s close association with Rezin king of Syria is explained by the proximity of Gilead to Syria and Rezin’s dominance of this region (Amos 1:3-5) along with Ammon (Amos 1:9). It would be a natural assurance in this political climate for Obadiah to declare specifically that Benjamin would possess Gilead.

For the above reasons, (1)-(8), we take Obadiah to be an eighth century prophet, contemporary with Joel, and prophesying during the Assyrian crises of the 730s and 720s. We take vv. 11-21 to be the earlier oracles of Obadiah that explain the downfall of Edom which he delineates in the oracles of vv. 1-10. This downfall took place at the border as an Edomite alliance turned in on itself in much the same way as had happened in the days of Jehoshaphat (2 Chronicles 20).

**Conclusion**

Reading Obadiah in the eighth century time-frame allows a commentator to respect the evidence of its location in the Hebrew order of the Minor Prophets amongst the eighth century Prophets. It also allows a commentator to respect the unity of the book coming from one prophet—Obadiah. In contrast the Babylonian reading splits the book up into earlier and later “prophets” with Obadiah himself assigned to the period around 587.

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**END**

1. J. Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 102. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John: An Introduction and Commentary* (Pillar New Testament Commentary: Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 87. ([Ed. AP] Carson’s observation is true of maybe all biblical scholarship: doctoral research rarely thinks out of the box and contents itself with nuancing the existing consensus as its contribution to “originality”.) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For a recent survey, see G. S. Sloyan, *What are they Saying about John?* (New York: Paulist Press, 2006). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. J. A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1976), 259; for a book review of *Redating*, see *Christadelphian EJournal of Biblical Interpretation 2007 Annual*, 123-126. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*, 103. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. For instance, R. G. Bratcher, “The Jews’ in the Gospel of John” *BT* 26 (1975): 401-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. J. L. Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (3rd ed.; Louisville: WJK Press, 2003), 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Often called the “Twelfth Benediction”; for further reading see Y. Y. Teppler, *Birkat Haminim*: *Jews & Christians in Conflict in the Ancient World* (Texts & Studies in Ancient Judaism; trans. S. Weingarten; Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 2007). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. W. Meeks, “Breaking Away: Three New Testament Pictures of Christianity’s Separation from the Jewish Communities” in “*To See Ourselves as Others See Us”: Christians, Jews, “Others” in Late Antiquity* (eds., J. Neusner and E. S. Friedrichs; Studies in the Humanities 9; Chico: Scholars Press, 1985), 93-115 (102). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Robinson, *Redating*, 272-273. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. D. R. A. Hare, *The Theme of Jewish persecution of Christians in the Gospel according to St Matthew* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 48-56. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 360. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Robinson, *Redating*, 293. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Although Dodd believes that the primitive tradition was somehow preserved and written down much later (90-100), his conclusion is conditioned by his belief that the Gospel is a later development. Robinson discounts this – a Gospel containing primitive material points more naturally to an early date. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. *Ant.* 18.116-119. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. J. E. Taylor, *The immerser: John the Baptist within second temple Judaism* (Studying the Historical Jesus; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. L. Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 78. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 55. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction With Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (2nd ed.; Louisville: WJK Press; 1978), 102. However, he adds different qualifying statements: “The case for Ephesus as the place of origin of the gospel is not strong, though perhaps a little stronger than has recently been allowed...” (129); “Ephesus remains, perhaps, the best choice because of the residue of weight in the Irenaeus tradition…”(131); “Over against this however must be set the fact that in the last decades of the first century there lived a John in Ephesus — the John of the Apocalypse....” (133). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. J. Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 98, remarks, “Why was it, for instance, that despite Paul’s remarkably wide ranging activities in the Greek-speaking world on both sides of the Aegean, John seems to have been virtually unaffected by his central ideas? Surely any self-respecting Christian syncretist of the period would have shown some Pauline influence”. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. J. A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1976), 304; for a review, see *Christadelphian EJournal of Biblical Interpretation Annual 2007*, 123-126. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (The New International Greek Testament Commentary; Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1982), 108-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Robinson, *Redating*, 305, does not see this as a problem. The argument from omission is a weak one. He says, “It is worth remembering that neither in Acts nor in Paul should we have any notion of Peter’s work in Corinth, the congregation, after all, whose history we know far better than any other, were it not for the facts that (*a*) he was married and (*b*) he was seen by a faction there as a rival of Paul—neither of which as far as we know applied to John”. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. It is taken for granted here that Luke-Acts is from the same hand, a premise accepted by most scholars. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (The New International Greek Testament Commentary; Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1978), 46-49. See also P. Winter, “Some observations on the Language in the Birth and Infancy Stories of the Third Gospel” *NTS* 1 (1954-55): 111-121. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. The same can be said of John the Baptist, who had done the preparatory work with water baptism but pointed forward to a greater Spirit baptism administered by Christ. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Perhaps the most well known presentation of this argument is that L. Hurtado, *One Lord, One God* (2nd ed.; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998). [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. J. McDowell & B. Larson, *Jesus: A Biblical Defence of His Deity* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1991), 60. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. J. C. O’Neill, *Who Did Jesus Think He Was?* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 77. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. R. Bauckham, *God Crucified* (Eerdmans, 1999), 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Bauckham, *God Crucified,* 14. For a recent study see L. Stuckenbruck, *Angel Veneration and Christology* (WUNT 2/70; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1995). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Bauckham, *God Crucified,* 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. For a recent study on this text, see C. E. Arnold, *The Colossian Syncretism: The Interface Between Christianity and Folk Belief at Colossae* (WUNT 2/77; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1995). [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. T. Friberg, B. Friberg & N. F. Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Baker Books, 2005), 334. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Bauckham, *God Crucified,* 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. For a study of this aspect in relation to the High Priest, see C. H. T. Fletcher-Louis, *Luke-Acts; Angels, Christology and Soteriology* (WUNT 2/94; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1997). [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. *TDNT*, 10:761; cf. Gen 33:3-7, 37:9-10, 42:6, 43:26-30; Ruth 2:10; 1 Sam 24:9; 1 Kgs 1:16. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. J. Lust, E. Eynikel and K. Hauspie, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1996), 403. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Peter’s refusal of the worship of Cornelius (Acts 10:25-26) is not sufficient to counter this conclusion, since Peter’s response seems to be born out of humility, rather than moral repugnance. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. The conjunction of this term with latreu,w [‘serve’] in this passage strengthens this conclusion as it is a probable allusion to Deut 6:13: “thou shalt fear [or worship] the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve [latreu,w]” (cf. Matt 4:10). [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. See A. Sáenz-Badillos, *A History of the Hebrew Language* (Cambridge Cambridge University Press, 1993). [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. The name of Ebla’s great king Eb-ri-um (or *Ibrium*), third millennium B.C.E., resembles the name ‘Eber’, the Hebrews’ ancestor. In a related Semitic language, Eblaite/Eblan, ‘Eb-ri-um’ shares the same root letters as ‘Eber’ and ‘Hebrew’. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Cp. ‘Naaman the Syrian’ in 2 Kg 5:20 and Luke 4:27; ‘Laban the Syrian’ in Gen 25:20, who is related to Israel (Jacob) and speaks Aramaic (Gen 31:47). [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Cited 17th March 2009 from <http://www.ibs.org/niv/background.php>. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. J. Thomas, *Eureka* (3 vols; Birmingham: CMPA, 1868), 3:118. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Thomas, *Eureka,* 3:122. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Thomas, *Eureka,* 3:128. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Thomas, *Eureka,* 3:134. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Thomas, *Eureka,* 3:143. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Thomas, *Eureka,* 3:146. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Thomas, *Eureka,* 3:148. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. G. Pearce, *The Revelation: Which Interpretation?* (Torrens Park: Christadelphian Scripture Study Service, 1982), 50, 111; C. C. Walker, *Notes on the Apocalypse* (Birmingham: CMPA, 1982), 30, 36-37; H. P. Mansfield, *The Apocalypse Epitomised* (Findon: Logos Publications, 1977) ,139, 158. G. Walker and R. Walker accept the Paulicians and the Nestorian church, and perhaps others “like Pelagius the British monk who *may* have held correct beliefs”—G. Walker and R. Walker, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Stoke: Bible Student Press, 1983), 69-70. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. R. Roberts, *Thirteen Lectures on the Apocalypse* (Birmingham: CMPA, 1977), 130. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. R. McHaffie, *Brethren Indeed?: Christadelphians and ‘Outsiders’ (16th-21st Century)* (Edinburgh: Published by the Author, 2001). [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Mansfield identifies the distinction between the ‘Woman’ and her ‘offspring’ (‘that keep the commandments of Christ’) as the distinction between ‘Protestantism’ and “the Ecclesia” (Mansfield, *Apocalypse Epitomised,* 158). [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Roberts, *Thirteen Lectures*, 103. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. W. H. Barker and W. H. Boulton, *The Apocalypse and History* (Birmingham: CMPA, 1977), 104. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. *Pace* Roberts:“there is evidence that the heretics as a class contained the brethren of Christ” (*Thirteen Lectures,* 103), and Barker and Boulton: “there are grounds for believing that the saints were grouped by their oppressors with those that openly and violently opposed the established systems”, *Apocalypse and History,* 106. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. For more on the Donatists, see W. H. C. Frend, *The Donatist Church* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952); B. D. Shaw, “African Christianity: Disputes, Definitions and ‘Donatists” in *Rules, Nomads and Christians in Roman North Africa,* (ed. B. D. Shaw; Aldershot: Variorum, 1995). [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. It seems unlikely that the Donatists defined themselves as a schism. As Shaw writes, they “were artificially created by definitions used by a central power and that ‘they’ never existed as such”, Shaw, “African Christianity”, 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. G. Macgregor, *Dictionary of Religion and Philosophy* (New York: Paragon House, 1991) 195; also see <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05121a.htm> [cited: 20 Jan 2009]. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Walker and Walker, *Revelation,* 70. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. J. Stevenson, *A New Eusebius: Documents Illustrating the History of the Church to AD 337* (London: SPCK, 1993), 302. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. S. G. F. Brandon, “Donatists” in *A Dictionary of Comparative Religion* (ed. S. G. F. Brandon; London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1970), 245. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. A. H. M. Jones, “Were Ancient Heresies National or Social Movements in Disguise?” *JTS* 10 (1959), 294. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. MacGregor, *Dictionary of Religion and Philosophy*, 442. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. For this reason Dionysius of Alexandria says that Novatian “falsely accuses our most compassionate Lord Jesus Christ of being without mercy”, Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, vii.8. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Thomas, *Eureka,* 3:128. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Roberts, *Thirteen Lectures*, 104. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. J. H. Broughton and P. J. Southgate, *The Trinity: True or False?* (Nottingham: Dawn Book Supply, 1995), 324. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. MacGregor, *Dictionary of Religion and Philosophy*, 192. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Stevenson, *A New Eusebius,* 265. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. D. F. Wright, “Manichaeism” in *New Dictionary of Theology* (eds. D. F. Wright, S. B. Ferguson, J. I. Packer; Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 410. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Stevenson, A New Eusebius, 268; MacGregor, Religion and Philosophy, 396. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. See “Diocletian’s Edict against the Manichees”in Stevenson, *A New Eusebius,* 267-8). [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Wright, “Manichaeism”,410. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. For more information on the Cathars (though a rather sympathetic treatment) see S. Martin, *The Cathars: The Most Successful Heresy of the Middle Ages* (Harpenden: Pocket Essentials, 2005). [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. J. I. Packer, “Albigenses” in *New Dictionary of Theology* (eds. D. F. Wright, S. B. Ferguson, J. I. Packer; Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 13; MacGregor, *Dictionary of Religion and Philosophy,* 15-16; and [cited: 20th January 2009] <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01253a.htm>. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. MacGregor, *Dictionary of Religion and Philosophy*, 70. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Martin, *The Cathars,* 36-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. MacGregor, *Dictionary of Religion and Philosophy,* 471; and [cited: 20th January 2009] <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11583.htm>. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. MacGregor, *Dictionary of Religion and Philosophy*, 15-16. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. [Cited: 20th January 2009] <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11781a.htm>. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. See A. Eyre, *The Protesters* (Birmingham: CMPA, 1985), 12-17. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Eyre, *Protesters,* 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Eyre, *Protesters,* 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Eyre, *Protesters,* 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. [Cited: 20th January 2009] <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15527b.htm>. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. A. Harnack, *History of Dogma*, (New York: Funk & Wagnalis; 1893), 449. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Eyre, *Protesters,* 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. [Cited: 20th January 2009] the Home page of <http://www.nestorian.org>. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. [Cited: 20th January 2009] <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07527b.htm>. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Walker and Walker, *Revelation,* 70. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. J. Blenkinsopp, *Opening the Sealed Book* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006). [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Other recensions of 1QS with this passage are 4Q258 6, 6-7 and 4Q259 3, 2-6. 4Q176 cites Isa 40:1-5 without comment. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. In Jewish tradition, the prophet was identified as Ahab’s chamberlain (1 Kgs 18) but there seems to be little to connect them except the name and their mutual service of the YHWH. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. E. B. Pusey, *Joel and Obadiah* (8 vols;London: James Nisbet & co., 1906), 3:274. Pusey describes the variation as a product of “unbelieving criticism” and a failure of commentators to grant true prophetic status to the words of scripture. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. S. R. Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (7th ed.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1898), 319-321. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Pusey, 3:278f; A. F. Kirkpatrick, *The* *Doctrine of the Prophets* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1892), 36f. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Driver, *Introduction,* 321; J. Barton, *Joel and Obadiah: A Commentary* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2001), 123. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. J. D. W. Watts, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 51; R. J. Coggins, “Judgment Between Brothers: A Commentary on the Book of Obadiah” in *Israel among the Nations: A Commentary on the Books of Nahum and Obadiah and Esther* (ed. R. J. Coggins & S. P. Re’emi; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 68; C. E. Armerding, *Obadiah* in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (12 vols; ed. F. E. Gaebelein *et al*.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 7:337; J. Renkema, *Historical Commentary on the Old Testament: Obadiah* (trans. B. Doyle; Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 30; P. R. Raabe, *Obadiah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 49f; Barton, 123. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. Driver, *Introduction,* 320; Barton, 123. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. W. Gesenius, *Hebrew Grammar* (2nd ed.; ed. E. Kautzsch; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1910), sections 46, 109, 110; hereafter, GKC. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Pusey, 277-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. T. J. Finley, *Joel, Amos, Obadiah – An Exegetical Commentary* (Biblical Studies Press, 2003), 80. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. This being said, it is recorded that the Edomites allied with the Ammonites and Moabites in an unsuccessful raid on Judah in the reign of Jehoshaphat (2 Chron 20:1). [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. ANET, 282. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Coggins, 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. Renkema, *Obadiah*, 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. Armerding, *Obadiah*, 7:336. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. Renkema, *Obadiah*, 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. Raabe, *Obadiah*, 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. Kirkpatrick, *The Doctrine of the Prophets*, 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Renkema, *Obadiah*, 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. *Diodorus Siculus* 19.95.2; 19.98.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. 1 Macc 4; 5:3; 2 Macc 10:15-6; Josephus, *Ant.* 12.8.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. Armerding, *Obadiah*, 7:335. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. Armerding, *Obadiah*, 7:336. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Raabe, *Obadiah*, 54. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. P. A. Beaulieu, *The Reign of Nabonidus King of Babylon 556-539 BC* (London: Yale University Press, 1989) 182-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. Armerding, *Obadiah*, 7:336. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. 1 Macc 5:3, 65; Josephus, *Ant*.12.8.1 (327-8). [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. Josephus, *Ant*.13.9.1 (257-8). [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. Coggins, “Obadiah”, 72, raises the possibility that Herod was called ‘Idumean’ as a “term of abuse” rather than an accurate description of his nationality. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. R. Mason, *Micah, Nahum, Obadiah* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 94. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. Commentators disagree on the Hebrew syntax of v. 10; we follow the KJV and RSV and the MT verse division. J. Barton, *Joel and Obadiah* (OTL; WJK Press, 2001), 143, offers a discussion of the disagreement and supports the MT and RSV. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. Mason, *Micah, Nahum, Obadiah*, 99, sees the change of topic between v. 10 and v. 11 as an “apparent inconsistency” which he attempts to resolve. However, there is no inconsistency in the reading that v. 10 closes vv. 8-10 and v. 11 opens the warnings of vv. 12-14. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 148; see also Mason, *Micah, Nahum, Obadiah*, 100. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. GKC, sections 46, 109, 110; R. J. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax: An Outline* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967), 184, 402. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 148. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. The LXX translates as aorist subjunctives which show that the RSV and KJV at least maintain an ancient translation of the Hebrew. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 135. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. The feminine suffix in “against her” is common and one usage is naturally for cities—Isa 7:1; 66:10; Jon 1:2; Zeph 2:15. One indication that Zion is meant is the use of the masculine elsewhere in Obadiah for Edom. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. The refrain of “cut off” (vv. 5, 9, 10) ties vv. 5-10 together as description and explanation of what befell the Edomites. The units are v. 5, vv. 6-7 and vv. 8-10. [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 120-123; see also H. W. Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1986). [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. E. B. Pusey, *Joel and Obadiah* (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1906), 274. [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. F. Pearce, *From Hosea to Zephaniah* (Birmingham: CMPA, 1979), 42; E. J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Rev. ed.; London: The Tyndale Press, 1960), 277. [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. Mason, *Micah, Nahum, Obadiah*, 93, notes this option but does not espouse it; he favours a Babylonian interpretation. His argument is that no capture of Jerusalem is recorded for the troubled reign of Ahaz (94). [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. The direction of dependency is certain as Jeremiah mixes his use of Obadiah with his own material, whereas Obadiah’s opening oracles (vv. 1-4; 5-9) are coherent and compact units; furthermore, this intermixing of Obadiah is comparable to how Jeremiah uses Isaiah. Were the direction of dependency to be the other way, one would have expected some characteristic idioms of Jeremiah to come across into Obadiah, but the common material has no such idioms—Pusey, *Joel and Obadiah*, 278-294. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. Pusey, *Joel and Obadiah,* 299—vv. 1-9, 17-18 for the early prophet; Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 120, vv. 1-4, 15b for the early prophet. [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. We cannot argue for this viewpoint here; L. C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah* (NICOT; London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1976), 133-136, offers a discussion and favours the case for a unified Obadiah. Our argument would be that the disunity arguments depend on the Babylonian misreading and once this is removed, the unity of the book comes into plain sight. Exactly where Obadiah divides up into its constituent oracles is also beyond our scope; Allen, *Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, 140-143, has a good overview. [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 118; Allen, *Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, 133. [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. Allen, *Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, 171. [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. Pusey, *Joel and Obadiah*, 303. [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. Of these two events, the attack in Jehoram’s reign is the more likely as Jehoram and Edom had been war (2 Kgs 8:20-22; 2 Chron 21:8-10). [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. *Contra* Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 120-121. [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. Edom broke its long-standing alliance with Judah (2 Sam 8:13-14; 2 Kgs 3:4-27) during Jehoram’s reign (2 Kgs 8:20-22) and this betrayal would stand long in the memory of Judah. [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. Hence, Mason, *Micah, Nahum, Obadiah*, 94, is wrong to argue that Ahaz’ reign is an unsuitable period for Obadiah—if at this time Obadiah includes an historical reference to the surrender of Jerusalem to the Arabian and Philistine alliance. [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 151; Allen, *Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, 133-136, sets out the options in full. [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. J. K. Kuan, *Neo-Assyrian Historical Inscriptions and Syria-Palestine* (Hong Kong: Alliance Bible Seminary, 1995), 152. [↑](#footnote-ref-150)