

עץ חיים

ETZ HAYIM

TORAH AND COMMENTARY

THE RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY
THE UNITED SYNAGOGUE OF CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM



Produced by THE JEWISH PUBLICATION SOCIETY

Etz Hayim: Torah and Commentary
Copyright © 2001 by the Rabbinical Assembly

Copyright © 2001 by The Rabbinical Assembly

*Hebrew text, based on Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia,
© 1999 by The Jewish Publication Society*

English translation © 1985, 1999 by The Jewish Publication Society

First edition. All rights reserved

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, except for brief passages in connection with a critical review, without permission in writing from:

*The Rabbinical Assembly
3080 Broadway
New York, NY 10027*

*Blessings for the Torah and haftiarot have been adapted from
Siddur Sim Shalom for Shabbat and Festivals, © 2000 by The Rabbinical Assembly.
Maps © by Oxford University Press, supplied by Oxford Cartographers. Used by permission of Oxford University Press.
Illustrations of the tabernacle and its furnishings by Joe Sikora.*

*Composition by VARDA Graphics, Skokie, Illinois
Design by Adrienne Onderdonk Dudden
Manufactured in the United States of America*

09 10 10 9 8

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Bible. O.T. Pentateuch. Hebrew. 2001.

Etz Hayim: Torah and commentary / senior editor, David L. Lieber; literary editor, Jules Harlow; sponsored by the Rabbinical Assembly and the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism.

p. cm.

Text of the Pentateuch in Hebrew and English; commentary in English.

Includes the haftiarot and commentary on them, p'shat and d'rash commentaries, comments on Conservative halakhic practice, topical essays, and other material.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-10: 0-8276-0712-1 ISBN-13: 978-0-8276-0712-5

1. Bible. O.T. Pentateuch—Commentaries. 2. Haftiarot—Commentaries. 3. Bible. O.T. Pentateuch—Theology. 4. Conservative Judaism—Customs and practices. I. Lieber, David L. II. Harlow, Jules. III. United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism. IV. Rabbinical Assembly. V. Bible. O.T. Pentateuch. English. Jewish Publication Society, 2001. VI. Title.

BS1222 .L54 2001

222'.1077—dc21

2001029757

Etz Hayim: Torah and Commentary
Copyright © 2001 by the Rabbinical Assembly

הַפְּטָרָה וַיִּשְׁלַח

HAFTARAH FOR VA-YISHLAḤ

OBADIAH 1:1–21

The entire brief book of Obadiah is the *haftarah*. The prophecy is a message of judgment and promise.

The judgment focuses on the nation of Edom, whose downfall is proclaimed for their treachery against their “brother Israel” during the siege and destruction of the First Temple. Because Edom participated in the plunder, they shall be plundered in turn (v. 15). Given these allusions, most modern scholars concur that the work was written sometime after the fall of Jerusalem in 587–586 B.C.E.

The theme of promise is addressed to Israel (the House of Jacob). On the day of doom they “shall wreak judgment on Mount Esau” (v. 21), inheriting its lands as part of a national resettlement in the promised land. The renewal of the ancient rivalry between Esau/Edom and Jacob/Israel will again result in the loss of the elder brother’s patrimony.

RELATION OF THE *HAFTARAH* TO THE *PARASHAH*

The narrative in the *parashah* and the prophecy in the *haftarah* stand at two opposite points in the historical spectrum of relations between Jacob (Israel) and Esau (Edom). The Torah narrative continues the account of the brothers’ relationship that began with embryonic and natal strife and assumed consequential proportions when Jacob deceived his father, Isaac, to obtain the blessing of the firstborn. As a result of the enmity engendered, Jacob fled to Paddan-aram where he married Leah and Rachel, assembled great wealth, and eventually made plans to return to his homeland at the divine behest. The *parashah* opens with Jacob sending messengers to Esau to placate his twin who is marching toward him with an army. Unexpectedly, Esau

receives his brother with a noble and generous spirit. The brothers separate in peace, each to his own land. National conflicts between their descendants lie in the distant future.

The *haftarah* takes us to the end of the biblical period, after Judah was exiled from its homeland and Edom participated in the downfall of the nation (cf. Ps. 137:7). The prophet indicts the elder “brother” for duplicity and arraigns him on charges of passive and active deceit. The roles of deceiver–deceived are now reversed, with fatal consequences for Edom. Obadiah predicts Edom’s destruction and dispossession. As a triumphant nation, Israel will consume Edom and resettle its homeland. What is more, this destruction is part of a scenario at “the end of days,” that will result in the restoration of God’s dominion over all.

It is not clear if the prophet saw Israelite restoration in world historical terms or as a case of national liberation. His rabbinic heirs clearly regarded the defeat of Edom as the end of historical tyranny and the onset of God’s universal kingship. This is because Edom had become a standard name for the hated Roman Empire. As a result, the prophecy of Obadiah fostered hopes for an end to this brutal domination and a restoration of national religious service. In due course, when Christendom assumed the mantle and the might of Rome, the name Edom received a new identity.

The encounter between Jacob and Esau marked by the *parashah* was dramatized in political terms through exemplifying Edom as imperial or medieval Rome and in religious terms through exemplifying Edom as the civil cult of Rome or as Christianity. For all postbiblical readers, Obadiah’s prophecy of liberators ascending Mount Zion to destroy Edom, and the anticipation of God’s dominion, was crucial. It was the

consolation preached by ancient Sages and recited by synagogue poets. Exemplary in this regard is the thematic centrality of Obad. 1:21 in Jewish liturgy, because it serves as one of the climactic verses in part of the *Rosh ha-Shanah Musaf* service (known as *Malkhuyot*), celebrating and proclaiming God's future kingdom or dominion. The verse also has a climactic presence

in the daily morning liturgy, where it occurs at the conclusion of *P'sukei d'Zimra* (an opening selection of biblical psalms and hymns before the call to worship [*Bar'khu*]). In both contexts, Obad. 1:21 is cited along with the prophecy of divine dominion in Zech. 14:9 ("And the LORD shall be king over all the earth; in that day there shall be one LORD with one name.")

1

The prophecy of Obadiah.

We have received tidings from the LORD,
And an envoy has been sent out among
the nations:

"Up! Let us rise up against her for battle."

Thus said my Lord GOD concerning Edom:

²I will make you least among nations,
You shall be most despised.

³Your arrogant heart has seduced you,
You who dwell in clefts of the rock,
In your lofty abode.

You think in your heart,

"Who can pull me down to earth?"

⁴Should you nest as high as the eagle,
Should your eyrie be lodged 'mong the
stars,

Even from there I will pull you down
—declares the LORD.

⁵If thieves were to come to you,

Marauders by night,

They would steal no more than they
needed.

Obadiah 1:1. The prophecy of Obadiah
The word translated as "prophecy" (*hazon*) literally means "vision."

We have received The plural form of the word translated as "we have received" (*shamannu*) is unexpected because there is only one

speaker. Ibn Ezra suggested that this reflects Obadiah's identification with other prophets like "Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Amos who prophesied against Edom."

3. You who dwell in clefts of the rock This image of living in a remote mountain fastness,

א

חזון עבדיה

כֹּה־אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה לְאֵדוֹם
שְׂמוּעָה שָׁמַעְנוּ מֵאֵת יְהוָה
וַעֲזַר בַּגּוֹיִם שְׁלַח
קוֹמוּ וְנִקְוֵמָה עֲלֶיהָ לְמִלְחָמָה:

² הִנֵּה קָטָן נִתְתִּיף בַּגּוֹיִם

בְּזוּי אֶתְּהָ מְאֹד:

³ זָדוֹן לִבְךָ הִשִּׁיֵּאֶךָ

שִׁכְנִי בַחֲגוּי־סֹלַע

מְרוֹם שְׁבֵתוֹ

אָמַר בְּלִבּוֹ

מִי יוֹרְדֵנִי אֶרֶץ:

⁴ אִם־תִּגְבֶּיָה כַּנְּשֹׁר

וְאִם־בֵּין כּוֹכָבִים שִׁים קִנְיָךָ

מִשָּׁם אוֹרִיֶדְךָ

נֶאֱמַר־יְהוָה:

⁵ אִם־גִּנְבִים בְּאוֹרֶיךָ

אִם־שׁוֹדֵדִי לִילָה

אֵיךָ נִדְמִיתָה

If vintagers came to you,
They would surely leave some gleanings.
How utterly you are destroyed!
6How thoroughly rifled is Esau,
How ransacked his hoards!
7All your allies turned you back
At the frontier;
Your own confederates
Have duped and overcome you;
[Those who ate] your bread
Have planted snares under you.

He is bereft of understanding.

8In that day

—declares the LORD—

I will make the wise vanish from Edom,
Understanding from Esau's mount.
9Your warriors shall lose heart, O Teman,
And not a man on Esau's mount
Shall survive the slaughter.

10For the outrage to your brother Jacob,
Disgrace shall engulf you,
And you shall perish forever.
11On that day when you stood aloof,
When aliens carried off his goods,
When foreigners entered his gates
And cast lots for Jerusalem,
You were as one of them.

12How could you gaze with glee
On your brother that day,
On his day of calamity!
How could you gloat
Over the people of Judah

הָלוֹא יִגְנְבוּ דֵימָם
אִם-בְּצָרִים בָּאוּ לָךְ
הָלוֹא יִשְׁאִירוּ עֲלֵלוֹת:
6 אֵיךְ נִחְפְּשׂוּ עֵשׂוֹ
נִבְעָו מִצְפָּנָיו:
7 עַד-הַגְּבוּל
שְׁלַחֲוֶךָ כֹּל אֲנָשֵׁי בְרִיתְךָ
הִשְׁיִאוּךָ יִכְלוּ לָךְ
אֲנָשֵׁי שְׁלֹמֶךָ
לַחֲמֶךָ
יִשְׁיִמוּ מִזֹּר תִּנְחַתֶּיךָ

אֵין תְּבוּנָה בּוֹ:

8 הָלוֹא בַיּוֹם הַזֶּה

נֶאֱמַר-יְהוָה

וְהִאֲבִדְתִּי חֲכָמִים מֵאֶדוֹם

וְתִבְוֶנָה מִהָרַר עֵשׂוֹ:

9 וְיַחַתּוּ גְבוּרֶיךָ תִימָן

לְמַעַן יִכְרַת-אִישׁ מִהָרַר עֵשׂוֹ

מִקְטָל:

10 מִחֲמַס אַחִיךָ יַעֲקֹב

תִּכְסֶּךָ בּוֹשָׁה

וְנִכְרַתָּ לְעוֹלָם:

11 בַּיּוֹם עֲמַדְךָ מִנְּגֵד

בַּיּוֹם שְׁבוֹת זָרִים חִילּוֹ

וְנִכְרָיִם בָּאוּ שַׁעֲרָיו

וְעַל-יְרוּשָׁלַיִם יָדוּ גוֹרָל

גַּם-אַתָּה כְּאַחַד מֵהֶם:

12 וְאַל-תִּרְאֶה

בַּיּוֹם-אַחִיךָ

בַּיּוֹם נִכְרוּ

וְאַל-תִּשְׂמַח

לְבִגְדֵי-הַיְהוּדָה

and thus beyond danger, portrays Edom's pride. (southeast of the Dead Sea), used here to designate Edom as a whole.
9. *Teman* A city and region in Edom

On that day of ruin!
 How could you loudly jeer
 On a day of anguish!
¹³How could you enter the gate of My
 people
 On its day of disaster,
 Gaze in glee with the others
 On its misfortune
 On its day of disaster,
 And lay hands on its wealth
 On its day of disaster!
¹⁴How could you stand at the passes
 To cut down its fugitives!
 How could you betray those who fled
 On that day of anguish!
¹⁵As you did, so shall it be done to you;
 Your conduct shall be requited.

Yea, against all nations
 The day of the LORD is at hand.
¹⁶That same cup that you drank on My
 Holy Mount
 Shall all nations drink evermore,
 Drink till their speech grows thick,
 And they become as though they had never
 been.
¹⁷But on Zion's mount a remnant shall
 survive,
 And it shall be holy.
 The House of Jacob shall dispossess
 Those who dispossessed them.
¹⁸The House of Jacob shall be fire,
 And the House of Joseph flame,
 And the House of Esau shall be straw;
 They shall burn it and devour it,

15. day of the LORD An anticipated time of judgment against Israel and the nations. It is first mentioned in Amos 5:18,20 and is usually depicted as accompanied by violent terrestrial and atmospheric disturbances (cf. this idiom in Ezek. 30:3 and Joel 1:15).

17. holy That is, inviolate. Compare Jer. 2:3, "Israel was holy to the LORD, / The first fruits of His harvest. / All who ate of it were held guilty."

בְּיוֹם אֲבָדָם
 וְאֵל־תִּגְדֹּל פִּיךָ
 בְּיוֹם צָרָה:
¹³אֵל־תִּבְּוֹא בְּשַׁעַר־עַמִּי
 בְּיוֹם אִידָם
 אֶל־תִּרְא גַם־אֶתָּה
 בְּרַעְתּוֹ
 בְּיוֹם אִידוֹ
 וְאֵל־תִּשְׁלַחְנָה בְּחִילוֹ
 בְּיוֹם אִידוֹ:
¹⁴וְאֵל־תִּעַמְדוּ עַל־הַפְּרָק
 לְהַכְרִית אֶת־פְּלִיטָיו
 וְאֵל־תִּסְגֹּר שְׁרִידָיו
 בְּיוֹם צָרָה:
¹⁵כִּי־קָרוֹב יוֹם־יְהוָה
 עַל־כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם
 כַּאֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ יַעֲשֶׂה לָּךְ
 גַּמְלָךְ יָשׁוּב בְּרֹאשְׁךָ:
¹⁶כִּי כַּאֲשֶׁר שְׁתִּיתֶם עַל־הַיַּר קִדְשִׁי
 יִשְׁתּוּ כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם תָּמִיד
 וְשָׁתוּ וְלָעוּ
 וְהָיוּ כַּלּוּא הָיוּ:
¹⁷וּבְהָר צִיּוֹן תִּהְיֶה פְּלִיטָה
 וְהָיָה קִדְשׁ
 וַיִּרְשׁוּ בַּיִת יַעֲקֹב
 אֶת מוֹרְשֵׁיהֶם:
¹⁸וְהָיָה בֵּית־יַעֲקֹב אֵשׁ
 וּבֵית יוֹסֵף לְהַבָּה
 וּבֵית עֵשָׂו לְקֶשׁ
 וְדָלְקוּ בָהֶם וְאָכְלוּם

And no survivor shall be left of the House
of Esau

—for the LORD has spoken.

¹⁹Thus they shall possess the Negeb and Mount Esau as well, the Shephelah and Philistia. They shall possess the Ephraimite country and the district of Samaria, and Benjamin along with Gilead. ²⁰And that exiled force of Israelites [shall possess] what belongs to the Phoenicians as far as Zarephath, while the Jerusalemite exile community of Sepharad shall possess the towns of the Negeb. ²¹For liberators shall march up on Mount Zion to wreak judgment on Mount Esau; and dominion shall be the LORD's.

18. for the LORD has spoken Hebrew: *ki YHVH dibber*. This formula gives divine authority to the prophet's words and was used to cite earlier prophecies at the time of their re-application to new circumstances. In this case, the reference is to the oracle against Edom recited by Balaam, in Num. 24:17. The same terms for dispossession and survival link the passages.

20. Zarephath A town on the Phoenician coast, also mentioned in 1 Kings 17:9 as being in the vicinity of Sidon.

Sepharad The Aramaic form of Sardis, a

וְלֹא־יִהְיֶה שְׂרִיד לְבַיִת עֵשָׂו
כִּי יְהוָה דִּבֶּר:
¹⁹וַיִּרְשׁוּ הַנֶּגֶב אֶת־הַר עֵשָׂו וְהַשְּׁפֵלָה
אֶת־פְּלִשְׁתִּים וַיִּרְשׁוּ אֶת־שְׂדֵה אֶפְרַיִם
וְאֶת שְׂדֵה שִׁמְרוֹן וּבְנֵימָן אֶת־הַגְּלָעָד:
²⁰וְגִלְתַּת הַחֲלִיָּה לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר־
כָּנְעָנִים עַד־צָרְפַת וְגִלְתַּת יְרוּשָׁלַם אֲשֶׁר
בְּסַפְרָד יִרְשׁוּ אֶת עַרְי הַנֶּגֶב: ²¹וְעָלוּ
מוֹשְׁעִים בְּהָר צִיּוֹן לְשַׁפֵּט אֶת־הָר עֵשָׂו
וְהִיְתָה לִיהוָה הַמְּלוּכָה:

city in Asia Minor, as evidenced by an Aramaic-Lydia bilingua inscription. Targum Jonathan and all later Jewish interpreters understood this place as Spain. On this basis, the Jews of Iberian descent are called *Sfardim*.

21. For liberators shall march up This concluding allusion to the "liberators" (*moshi-im*) of Israel, who will "wreak judgment" (*lishpot*) on the enemy, makes use of the old language of saviors and judgment found in the Book of Judges (cf. Ibn Ezra). The liberators here came to be understood as the Messiah and his companions (Radak).