

Bellows Family

# MATAN AL HAPEREK

The Six-Year Online Weekly | Tanakh Learning Program

## Sefer Ovadh

The book of Ovadh comprises only 21 pesukim, making it the shortest book in the Tanakh. Ovadh's vision revolves around the disaster which will befall the Edomites as a punishment for the oppression of their brother Israel in his time of trouble. The book does not mention a time or place in which it occurs. The Rabbis identify Ovadh with *Ovadh, who was over the household*, who appears in Melachim I 18. However, Ibn Ezra already disagreed with that identification. Today the accepted opinion is that Ovadh prophesied during the destruction of the first Temple, and the background to his prophecies is the cooperation of the Edomites with the Babylonians in the conquest of Judah. Ovadh emphasizes that not only did Edom stand aside and not help his brother Yehudah, he also betrayed him, by helping his enemies and turning over the refugees from the war to the Babylonians. Sefer Ovadh is divided into three sections: in the first part the malicious ways of Edom which brought to its downfall are described (1-9). The second part (10-14) speaks about Edom's oppression of Yaakov and estrangement in his time of need. The third section (15-21) envisions the coming of the Day of the Lord to the nations in general and to Edom in specific, when the wheels of fortune will turn and the exiles of Israel will inherit Eisav.

### 1.

**a** | The tension between Israel and Edom is woven into the history of Israel in the Tanakh - beginning with the prolonged struggle between Yaakov and Eisav, continuing with the estrangement of Edom, with the refusal of Edom to allow Israel to pass through its borders during the exodus from Egypt (Bamidbar 20:20) and with the cruel war with Israel during the days of the judges and kings, as we see in the prophecy of Amos (1:11): *So said the Lord: For three sins of Edom, yea for four, I will not return them: For pursuing their brother with a sword, and they destroyed their mercy and grasped forever their anger and kept their fury forever.* The height of the struggle occurred during the time of the destruction. Prophecies of anger and doom about the actions of Edom during the destruction appear in Yirmiyahu and Yechezkel, who lived during the period of the destruction. The Edomite treachery and their joy at the downfall of Jerusalem are mentioned in Tehillim 137 as well: *Remember, O Lord, for the sons of Edom, the day of Jerusalem, those who say, "Raze it, raze it, down to its foundation!"*

## Ovadiah

It is also found in Eicha 4:21: *Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom, who dwells in the land of Uz; upon you also shall the cup pass, you shall become drunk and vomit.* Study the words of Ovadiah and see how the landscapes of Edom and the names of its cities and even the events from its past are hinted at in the words.

**b |** *Behold I have made you small among the nations (2)*

After the call to war with Edom which appears in pasuk 1, the prophecy outlines the characteristics of Edom and contrasts between their actual and their perceived situation. Follow the three images which deal with rising and falling which appear in pesukim 3-4. What is the background of Edom's arrogance? Use the commentary of **Daat Mikra**:

And we have found that some of the cities of Edom were built high up in the rocks, and their buildings were carved in caves and by caves.

See also Melachim II 14:7.

### 2.

Edom's punishment is given in detail in pesukim 5-9:

See how the three foundations of Edom are undermined and cut down in these pesukim (5-6, 7, 8-9).

### 3.

*Because of the violence of your brother Yaakov, shame shall cover you (10)*

The main sin of Edom is noted in pasuk 10 and explained in pesukim 11-14. Two central words are used in this section: "Day" (10 times) and "do not" – meaning should not - (8 times), thus indicating what Edom should not do on the day of his brother's plight. Follow the progression of Edom's actions on the day of the destruction of Judah. How does Edom's attitude toward Judah change from that of a brother to that of a stranger?


### 4.

The last section of the book describes the retribution which will come to Edom and the nations. In pasuk 18 the house of Eisav is compared to straw which will catch fire and be burnt by the houses of Yaakov and Yosef – alluding to the kingdoms of Judah and Israel.

**a |** Why do you think this image was chosen for the punishment of Eisav? To answer, examine the description of the punishment in pesukim 4-6 and 9-10.

**b |** Compare the punishment in pasuk 18 to the last of the actions of Edom in the end of pasuk 14. Pay attention to the repetitive language in the descriptions of the sin and the punishment. How does this comparison clarify our understanding of the punishment?

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### 5.

After the complete destruction of the house of Eisav, the prophet focusses on a prophecy of consolation for Judah and Israel who will return from the exile and inherit the mountains of Eisav (19-20). The roots of the battle over the inheritance go far back into the past – to the fathers of the nations – Yaakov and Eisav. What is the result of that early struggle?

**a |** See the description of the division of the land in Bereshit 36:6-8. This division is mentioned in God's words in Devarim 2:4-5. How is it explained there?


**b |** See the prophecy of Yechezkel about Edom during the destruction in perek 35 (especially pesukim 10-11). How is the struggle reawakened? Explain the meaning of the prophecy of Ovadhah about inheriting Edom in light of this process.

### APPENDIX – From Eisav ben Yitzchak to Edom, Rome and Christianity/Avigdor Shaanan (free translation)

In Sefer Bereshit we read about two brothers, sons of Yitzchak, and about the complicated relationship between them. Already in the Torah itself, we see the development of a relationship between the nations which is alternately a close one and a rivalrous one. With time, the relationship becomes more tense, and the prophet Malachi puts the words *"and I hated Eisav"* into the mouth of God, while the prophet Ovadhah, in the end-days of the first Temple, mocks the Edomites; *"Behold I have made you small among the nations; you are very despised."* (2) Slowly the name Edom becomes a designation for all those who hate and attack Israel. Even the psalm which is a lamentation for the destruction of the Temple by the Babylonians, which begins with the words *"By the rivers of Babylon"* ends with the request: *"Remember, O Lord, for the sons of Edom, the day of Jerusalem, those who say, "Raze it, raze it, down to its foundation!"*" (137:7). Already there we see that Edom is a general designation of an enemy. What begins in the Tanakh continues even more so in the Rabbinic literature. While Edom as a nation or a kingdom was not a major part of history, its name was used as a general description of each new enemy, especially the Roman and Byzantine empires, and a little later the Christian religion, which became the religion of the Roman Empire from the 4<sup>th</sup> century on.

...The people of the middle ages inherited the identification of Edom with Christianity from the Rabbis, and continued to develop it, in parallel with the use of "Yishmael" for Moslems and all of the Islamic countries. The liturgist, R Avraham Ibn Ezra, for example, writes that "At the hand of Yishmael we have been scorned/we ran to Edom and we did not live" (in a poem that begins with the words "Where are

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# Ovadhiah

the prophecies of the early prophets?") In the discussion of the kingdoms to which Israel has been subject – on the one hand the Christian kingdoms and on the other the Moslem ones – again and again the rabbis who suffered under the yoke of Islam used the phrase: "Under Edom and not under Yishmael" (see, for example, Rabbeinu Bechaye on Devarim 30:7). Another phrase which identifies Edom with the Christian world is found in the last stanza of the well-known liturgical poem "Maoz Tzur" - *Repel the Red One (Admon) in the nethermost shadow* – a request from God to push away Edom and the Christian lands into the shadow of death.


## מעוז צור

לָךְ נֶאֱדָה לְשִׁבְחֲךָ	מֵעוֹז צוֹר יִשׁוּעָתִי
וְשֵׁם תְּנוּדָה נִזְבַּחַךְ	תִּכְוֶן בַּיִת תְּפִלָּתִי
מִצָּר הַמְּנַבְּחִי	לֵעֵת תִּכְוֶן מִטְבַּחֲךָ
תְּנַכַּת הַמְּזַבְּחִי	אֶז אֶגְמֹר בְּשִׁיר מְזֻמֹּר
	...
וְקָרַב קֶחַךְ הַיְשׁוּעָה	חֲשׂוֹף זְרוּעֵי קִדְשֶׁךָ
מֵאֲמָה הָרַשָּׁעָה	נִקָּם נִקְמַת עֲבָדֶיךָ
וְאִין קֶחַךְ לַיְמֵי הָרַעָה	כִּי אֶרְכָּה הַשָּׁעָה
הַקָּם לָנוּ רוּעִים שְׂבָעָה	דְּחָה אֲדָמוֹן בְּצַל צִלְמוֹן

## Maoz Tzur – Stronghold of My Salvation

O mighty stronghold of my salvation,  
to praise You is a delight.  
Restore my House of Prayer  
and there we will bring a thanksgiving offering.  
When You will have prepared the slaughter  
for the blaspheming foe,  
Then I shall complete with a song of hymn  
the dedication of the Altar.

...  
Bare Your holy arm  
and hasten the End for salvation -  
Avenge the vengeance of Your servants' blood  
from the wicked nation.  
For the triumph is too long delayed for us,  
and there is no end to days of evil,  
Repel the Red One (Admon) in the nethermost shadow  
and establish for us the seven shepherds.

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מִן מֵתָן

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