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MY BROTHER'S A JERK AND DAD'S GONNA SPANK HIM:
ROLES AND RELATIONS IN OBADIAH

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A Paper Submitted to the Faculty of the School of Theology and Seminary of
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MY BROTHER'S A JERK AND DAD'S GONNA SPANK HIM:
ROLES AND RELATIONS IN OBADIAH

This paper presents research and analysis on the use of violence in the Book of Obadiah to make claims of a restored strong masculinity for God, the nation of all-Israel, and the author. The paper finds that these claims can only partially be validated due to the violent nature of the threats and due to how the exile ended.

This paper may be duplicated.
Aletta Stumo

The Book of Obadiah - a Translation by Renkema¹

1. Vision of Obadiah

thus says Lord YHWH concerning Edom

we have had word from YHWH

that a messenger has been sent to the people

stand up

yes, let us rise up against her for battle

2. See, small shall I make you among the nations

utterly despised you will be

3. The pride of your heart misled you

he who settles in the rock clefts of his high dwelling

and in his heart says

who will bring me down to the earth

4. Though you make your nest as high as the vulture

yes, should your nest be set among the stars

even from there I would bring you down, says the word of YHWH

5. Yes, had thieves come to you or housebreakers in the night

ah, how you have been destroyed

would they not steal only what suited them

indeed, had vine pickers come to you

would they not leave a gleaning behind

6. Ah, how Esau has been ransacked, his storehouses cleaned out

to their border they dismiss you

7. All your allies

they deceive you and are too strong for you, your peace-deal partners

those who eat your bread

set him who has become a stranger to you in your place

he is at his wit's end

8. Is it not on that day, says the word of YHWH

that I will make the wise disappear from Edom

and insight from Edom's mountain

9. Startled then will be your heroes, O Teman

so that people will come to nothing in Esau's mountain

10. For murder, for violence against your brother Jacob

shame will cover you

11. And you will be counted as nothing for all time on the day of your aloofness

the day that strangers seized his leaders

foreigners entered his gate and cast lots over Jerusalem

you too became like one of them

12. And do not look to the day of your brother

and do not rejoice over the people of Judah on the day of their downfall

and do not brag on the day of distress

1 Johan Renkema. "The literary structure of Obadiah." in *Delimitation Criticism: A New Tool in Biblical Scholarship*. (Assen, Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 2000), 230-276. Translation using the Masoretic Text, 4 Greek texts, and 4 Syriac texts. This translation is favored by recent scholars interested in literary and poetic concerns of the book.

13. You must not enter the gate of my people on the day of their visitation
you must not gloat - not you- over his misfortune, on the day of his visitation
and do not stretch out your hand towards his possessions on the day of his visitation
14. And do not stand at the escape route to wipe out his refugees
and do not hand over his survivors on the day of visitation
15. Yes, close is YHWH's day against all peoples
As you have done, it shall be done to you
your recompense shall return upon your head
16. For as you drink on my holy mountain, all the peoples shall drink, to the full
they shall drink and splutter and become as if they had never existed
17. But on Mount Zion there shall be no escape and it shall be holy
and the house of Jacob shall once more possess its possessions
18. And the house of Jacob shall be fire
and the house of Joseph a flame
and the house of Esau straw
and they shall set it on fire and consume it
and Esau's house shall have no escapees
19. And the southern land shall possess Esau's mountain and the lowland Philistea
And Ephraim shall possess Samaria's field
and Benjamin Gilead
20. And the exiles in Chalach, from Israel shall possess Canaan as far as Sarepta
and Jerusalem's exiles in Sparda shall take possession of the cities of the Southern land
21. And rescuers shall ascend Mount Zion to rule Esau's mountain
and the kingdom shall be YHWH's.

The book of Obadiah is a prophetic oracle against the nation of Edom, neighbor to the nation of all-Israel (Israel and Judah). The book of Obadiah makes prophetic claims for the author (presumably the prophet Obadiah), all-Israel, and Yahweh that their masculine identities which were lost during the fall of Jerusalem will be restored through devastating violence to Edom. These prophetic claims are claims are only partially proven because they come from deep, violent feelings which can only partially describe Yahweh or the author's current situation.

Background

Other than his name, little is known of the implied author, Obadiah.² Some items can be inferred from the text: that he was from the Levant and that he prophesied after the fall of Jerusalem in 586

2 Peter R. Ackroyd. "Obadiah." in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. David Noel Freedman, ed. New York: Doubleday, 1992. As with other commentaries, the remarks here are that the book of Obadiah does not contain a call of the prophet section from which a biographical outline might be created. Also, the name Obadiah is a common name in the OT when counted with derivations.

BCE and probably before the building of the second temple in 521 BCE, though possibly as late as the end of the nation of Edom circa 450-440 BCE.³ These inferences come from his having a Judean perspective as seen in the memories of Jerusalem, details in the accusation about the fall of Jerusalem, no correct details of the return of exiles to Jerusalem, and no correct details of the fall of Edom to the Nabateans. The name Obadiah (he serves the Lord) is vague enough that scholars contend whether there was an actual prophet by that name or the book was assembled by a compiler from other oracles. For the purposes of this paper, the question can be set aside. Someone put the oracle together.⁴ That someone can be called an author. That author has a distinctive Judean, post-fall perspective and created this oracle as the prophet Obadiah.

The book of Obadiah expresses a common view of masculinity for a patriarchal society of the Levant in first millennium BCE.⁵ All-Israel was a self-sustaining patriarchal society before the Assyrian conquest in 722 BCE. Men held the key positions in society and determined inheritance and land ownership. Being a male was, as a result, desirable. Not surprisingly, a common view of masculinity is found in other Old Testament texts, produced in the same patriarchal culture, in which Yahweh is portrayed as the strong, victorious, male leader of a conquering people.⁶ This view considers certain traits and roles to be indicative of and part of masculinity. The culture scholar Georg Tillner defines

3 Samuel Pagan. "Obadiah." in *The New Interpreter's Bible: General Articles & Introduction, Commentary, & Reflections for Each Book of the Bible, Including the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books*. Leander Keck et al, eds. Vol. 7, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 437. Commentaries like NIB suggest as early as 686 BCE, others like Collegeville suggest as late as 586. Mary Margaret Pazdan OP. "Obadiah." Dianne Bergant and Robert J. Karris, eds. *The Collegeville Bible Commentary: Based on the New American Bible with Revised New Testament*. (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 1989), PAGE 586-591. While the exact date of composition is still listed as unknown, a majority of current scholarship agrees on the 70 years of exile.

4 Jakob Wöhrle. "So Many Cross-References! Methodological Reflections on the Problem of Intertextual Relationships and their Significance for Redaction Critical Analysis." in *Perspectives on the Formation of the Book of the Twelve: Methodological Foundations, Redactional Processes, Historical Insights*. Rainer Albertz, James Nogalski, and Jakob Wöhrle, eds. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012. 3-20. He asserts that there are signs of redaction in this text. However, the evidence in this paper is concerned with authorial layers, except where noted.

5 Oystein G Holter. "Masculinities in Context: On Peace Issues and Patriarchal Orders." in *Male Roles, Masculinities and Violence: A Culture of Peace Perspective*. Ingeborg Breines, Raewyn Connell, and Ingrid Eide, eds. (Paris: UNESCO Pub, 2000), 69.

6 Among the other passages to do so are 1 Kings 7:25-8:2, Jer 46-51, Joel 4:9-21, Nahum 1:1-10, Nahum 2:3-14, Zeph 2:8-12, Zeph 3:16-17, and Psalm 76.

masculinity as "the notion of identity as dominance that most male roles express, whether in concepts of physical strength, power, or even competence," and this definition is definitely part of the author of Obadiah's sense of masculine identity.⁷ The list of concepts, or attributes, that Tillner ascribes to the masculine role and are found in Obadiah include the following: aggressive, decisive, superior (in the sense of commanding), loyal, eloquent, persuasive, protective and honorable.

These attributes do not appear in the text explicitly. At no point does the author of Obadiah say Yahweh is a man because he is violent and in charge. That would require author to be outside the author's own cultural context. From within the all-Israel context, Yahweh is depicted as the male warrior god, protector of Judah, and judge of Edom.⁸ Edom is depicted as Esau, a male character from Genesis, and Judah as Jacob, Esau's male twin, thereby referring to the mythic tale of the fraternal relation of the tribes that became the nations of Edom and Judah. These depictions allow the author to give attributes to Yahweh and the nations by showing action and by calling on stories from the past.

Writing inside this context the author of Obadiah assigns gender to both nations. As the sociologist Robert Connell notes, "gender involves large scale institutions as well as interpersonal relations. Gender involves power structures and economic relationships."⁹ The human mind sees opposition and inequality and will assign markers for the dominant and dominated in terms of gender according to cultural norms. This assignment is always done by *them*, the concept of Other who lay down the norms of a culture and devise the sayings of the culture, etc. In a patriarchal society like all-

7 Georg Tillner. "The Identity of Dominance: Masculinity and Xenophobia." in *Male Roles, Masculinities and Violence: A Culture of Peace Perspective*. Ingeborg Breines, Raewyn Connell, and Ingrid Eide, eds. (Paris: UNESCO Pub, 2000), 56.

8 James D. Nogalski. "Not Just Another Nation: Obadiah's Placement in the Book of the Twelve." in *Perspectives on the Formation of the Book of the Twelve: Methodological Foundations, Redactional Processes, Historical Insights*. Rainer Albertz, James Nogalski, and Jakob Wöhrle, eds. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 103. This depiction of Yahweh as judge entirely ignores the fact that Edom had a god of its own (presumably Qaus/Kaus). YHWH is mentioned on a stele in Edom in the 8th century but Qaus/Kaus was apparently the national protector. While YHWH judging the tribe of another god is not unique in the prophetic oracles against foreign nations, it is a claim of divine superiority.

9 Robert W. Connell. "Arms and the Man: Using the New Research on Masculinity to Understand Violence and Promote Peace in the Contemporary World." Breines, Ingeborg, Raewyn Connell, and Ingrid Eide, ed. *Male Roles, Masculinities and Violence: A Culture of Peace Perspective*. (Paris: UNESCO Pub, 2000), 23.

Israel, the nations and tribes are assigned the gender of male, while cities, smaller than nations, are assigned the gender of female. Throughout the Old Testament, Israel and Judah are referred to as masculine.

Judah and Israel assigned themselves the title, with masculine gender, of all-Israel. This title signified a conflation "between a people and a wide area of land [that] was facilitated by the belief that the power of Yahweh was dispersed throughout both the land and the people."¹⁰ This belief is manifest in the sense of land covenant mentioned again and again in the Old Testament. When Assyrian and Babylonian invaders came and took the people from the land, their link to Yahweh was broken; their nation was broken. They could no longer claim a unified identity under Yahweh. They could no longer claim to be a strong and masculine nation.

The Claim for Yahweh

The first, and highest, claim to investigate is that Yahweh is still the protector of Judah and Israel, still has honor, is stronger than the god of Edom, and will restore all-Israel to its former glory. The language at the start of this oracle is similar to other Oracles Against Foreign Nations, but not exactly so. For example, Joel starts with "The Word of the Lord that came to Joel" (Joel 1:1), and Jeremiah starts an oracle with "Thus says the Lord." (Jer 49:7)¹¹ The author of Obadiah uses thus says but then uses the double divine name. The use of "we have had word from YHWH" in verse 1 is unique. The line "we have had word from YHWH" suggests that the speaker is pleased, and perhaps even somewhat surprised, that Yahweh still speaks to a Judahite as in the past, that Yahweh still wants communication with and belief from the people. This claim will be seen again at the end of the oracle in verses 15-17 when the Day of the Lord will come on Mount Zion and the Edomites will be punished while the house of Jacob will take possession. The prospect of being on Mount Zion with Yahweh's

¹⁰ Steven Elliott Grosby. *Biblical Ideas of Nationality Ancient and Modern*. (Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 83.

¹¹ Both quotes from NRSV.

permission indicates Yahweh's pleasure to resume the protective deity role.

In the ancient Levant and throughout the Mediterranean, "honor and shame were core values" linked to esteem and gender identity.¹² Individuals, protective deities, and societies were motivated to avoid shame at all times by honorable action and secrecy. Botha, in his analysis of the values of Obadiah, notes that the language denotes shame and honor: small and despised in verse 2, deceived or misled in verse 3, heights and soar in verse 3 and 4, among the stars in verse 4, dismiss in verse 6, and shame in verse 10. He further notes how Obadiah links Yahweh's honor to all-Israel's honor since it was Yahweh "who was seen to control their existence. Edom's participation in the shaming of Judah therefore is tantamount to mockery of Yahweh."¹³ Botha uses the term mockery to show the extent to which shaming a lesser *man* in that society shames the superior *man* to whom the lesser one is bound.

If Edom hears this, then they are shamed by this portrayal of their dishonorable behavior in and after the fall of Jerusalem and the suggestion that Kaus/Qaus cannot save them. No one knows whether the people of Edom heard this oracle. It may have been part of a liturgy performed by priests in exile.¹⁴ The honor then would be for Yahweh, the priests speaking the oracle, as well as the intended audience in the temples in exile. The author wishes to say that Yahweh still has honor through dishonoring Edom, rather than solely speaking to and about Edom.

Obadiah does not stop at honor/dishonor, instead going on to make threats against Edom that will have effect in their very utterance and in any violence they might provoke. The judgment in an oracle against a nation is itself a medium of retaliation. Rainer Albertz, an OT scholar, suggests that the act of speaking has power. The Oracles Against Foreign Nations are similar to war curses and contain

12 Phil J. Botha. "Social Values in the Book of Obadiah." *Old Testament Essays* 16, (2003): 581.

13 Botha, "Social Values in the Book of Obadiah," 592-593.

14 Ehud Ben Zvi. *A Historical-Critical Study of the Book of Obadiah*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1996, 21. He suggests that the use of the double divine name may indicate that it was part of a liturgy. Albertz. *Israel in Exile: The History and Literature of the Sixth Century B.C.E.*, 189. He suggests that the oracles against the nations as a whole were part of a foreign defense and retaliation liturgy. The use of repetitive language in this book does imply orality either in composition or performance.

“the element of the efficacious word.”¹⁵ In the very act of listening to Obadiah, the will of the listeners is turned toward acts of retaliation. Texts like Obadiah which shame another party through taunting and cursing "often precede violence and are motivated by the same relational intentions that motivate the subsequent violence."¹⁶

In verse 2 the verdict is given from the first person perspective, as if YHWH is speaking the verdict of condemnation. The threats against Edom are made in confidence that Yahweh, their protector, will destroy, bring down and make the people as well as the nation disappear. Yahweh as depicted here does not expect that the god of Edom, Qaus/Kaus, will be strong enough to protect the people of Edom. The confidence that the author has in Yahweh is contrasted with the confidence of the people of Edom. The pride of their (Edom's) hearts in verse 3 makes them think they are invincible, but Yahweh will bring them down. The Yahweh of this book is aggressive, decisive, and violent. *He* has decided that Edom is to suffer and is now giving, through the prophet, a description of how this is to happen.

Yahweh, then, through the prophet has started the downfall of Edom in this oracle, just as other prophets have done in anti-Edom oracles in other prophetic passages. Likewise, this series of claims for Yahweh's masculinity are made in other prophetic passages, though here the other aspects of Yahweh (nurturing, forgiving, and rejoicing) are not seen due to the single focus and brevity of this prophecy. And like the other passages, this depiction of Yahweh is linked to the depictions of all-Israel and Edom.

The Claim for All-Israel

The second claim to investigate is that Judah will be a strong, masculine nation again following the punishment and destruction of Edom. This claim carries with it accusations that Judah did not fall

15 Rainer Albertz. *Israel in Exile: The History and Literature of the Sixth Century B.C.E.* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 182.

16 Alan Page Fiske and Tage Shakti Rai. *Virtuous Violence: Hurting and Killing to Create, Sustain, End, and Honor Social Relationships.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 15.

due to its own sins or weakness and that Edom was involved in the downfall.¹⁷ To the best of Biblical scholars' knowledge, these nations had a history of dominating each other at times and respecting agreements at other times.¹⁸ They also were neighboring nations with a lengthy shared boundary which would suggest a long history of trade and cultural exchange. All-Israel as a patriarchal culture would have conducted these affairs in what it would see as an honorable and powerful manner (i.e. masculine manner). Edom would have done the same, though Edom did not have the same sense of identity as a nation, instead having "a tribal confederation which is centered on a town and a dynasty" that gave them some national identity.¹⁹ What they did have in common was a sense of honor/shame and the myth of tribal relations. The common story of kinship between the tribes of Esau (Edom) and Jacob (Judah) permits an understanding of their past and present as bonded males with households who are often at odds. Obadiah draws on what Old Testament scholar Joachim Krause calls "the narrative of the difficult relationship of the enemies' fathers" and employs this relation between tribes to introduce and frame the theme of wrongdoing.²⁰ As Paul Raabe notes, Obadiah employs this Esau-Jacob relationship more than any other prophet, using the fraternal bond to add a treasonous tone "of bewilderment and horror that underlies much of the book."²¹

Obadiah presents more explicit accusations against Edom than any other OT prophecy. While Psalm 137 gives quotes from the Edomites at the battle of Jerusalem, the list of charges here is longer.²² The author presents the charges: gloating, being at the destruction, not helping, blocking fleeing survivors, and taking land afterwards. In this oracle, Edom was a bystander when they should have

17 This book does not imply that the fall was due to covenant breaking on the part of the royalty or the people, unlike many other prophetic texts of the exilic period.

18 Joachim J. Krause. "Tradition, History, and Our Story: Some Observations on Jacob and Esau in the Books of Obadiah and Malachi," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*. Vol 32.4 (2008): 479.

19 Grosby, *Biblical Ideas of Nationality Ancient and Modern*, 146.

20 Krause, "Tradition, History, and Our Story: Some Observations on Jacob and Esau in the Books of Obadiah and Malachi," 479.

21 Paul R. Raabe. *Obadiah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 43.

22 Psalm 137:7 "Remember, O LORD, against the Edomites/the day of Jerusalem's fall,/how they said, 'Tear it down! Tear it down!/Down to its foundations!'" NRSV.

been allies. Krause relates this to the Esau relation by suggesting the "fraternal envy which motivates such machinations in Genesis [harboring plans of hatred] is also to be felt in the malicious gaze on the ruined neighbor."²³ The taking of land in all-Israel is a reversal of Jacob's taking of Esau's birthright. Only in a few of the books of the Minor Prophets and Jeremiah, is the reference to Edom as Esau a part of the condemnation of Edom.²⁴ For these prophets the sense of fraternal betrayal is an obvious marker of Edom's criminality, obvious to members of these patriarchal tribes which valued fraternal relations as strong and honorable.

The author makes a claim that Edom as a brother nation should have defended Jerusalem and befriended refugees. This is a claim of honor for all-Israel and of shame for Edom, thereby reducing Edom's masculine status. Botha believes this rhetorical strategy "is to counterbalance the shame of Judah during its destruction with the shame and destruction Edom will experience."²⁵ The prediction is that Edom will fall more thoroughly in the same way as Judah. Edom's god will be unable to protect them, and they shall be a nation no longer. Yahweh and all-Israel which had been reduced in status by losses to the Assyrians and Babylonians will rise through the lowering of Edom. Social psychologists Alan Fiske and Tague Rai describe this use of violence to adjust status between agents in a relationship as an act of Equality Matching. In the vengeance dynamic of Equality Matching one agent will act violently to bring the other down and promote their own status.²⁶ An outsider looking logically at the facts of an act of Equality Matching will be confused; violence does not promote status.²⁷ However, the

23 Krause, "Tradition, History, and Our Story: Some Observations on Jacob and Esau in the Books of Obadiah and Malachi," 479.

24 Scoralick, Ruth. "The Case of Edom in the Book of the Twelve: Methodological Reflections on Synchronic and Diachronic Analysis." in *Perspectives on the Formation of the Book of the Twelve: Methodological Foundations, Redactional Processes, Historical Insights*. Rainer Albertz, James Nogalski, and Jakob Wöhrle, eds. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012. 46.

25 Botha, "Social Values in the Book of Obadiah," 594.

26 Fiske, *Virtuous Violence: Hurting and Killing to Create, Sustain, End, and Honor Social Relationships*, 32.

27 Both Raabe and Scoralick are unable to make sense of the violence in this book logically and do not understand that the thought process is non-linear thinking. Perhaps for them and others violence is expected to stem from rational, linear thought.

thought process of someone performing Equality Matching stems from feelings rather than logic. The performing agent of the Equality Matching wants the elation of achieving the violence and wants the receiving agent to feel the hurt inflicted and react by returning to their submissive or equal role. In the violent fantasy of this oracle, Edom would be reduced to the same broken state as all-Israel and would have learned a lesson about how to behave to a brother tribe. In actual employment of Equality Matching, the end results are rarely the fantasized results. For instance in domestic abuse the partner rarely learns the intended lesson of loving submission. In international affairs the attacked country rarely learns to remain inferior voluntarily. As a result, these threats would probably not lead to the author's presumed goal of reducing Edom and erasing the shame of all-Israel.

Obadiah expresses hurt at this mythic-level betrayal and a sense of superiority at not being the betrayer.²⁸ Understandably, the author of Obadiah does not equate Edom's action in the recent past with revenge for the mythic past. Edom's possible desire for or possible right to mythic revenge is ignored.²⁹ This sense of superiority is visible also in the author not claiming all-Israel was weak before or during the exile. No shame attaches to Judah from their actions; they need to be restored to the land thus avoiding more shame from what they were unable to prevent. In verses 19 to 21 after Edom's allies and the people of Judah have done the Lord's destructive bidding, then Yahweh will restore the former lands to Judah.³⁰ The end of the depictions of the nations marks the end of the oracle, unlike the claims of the author which run throughout the oracle without ever being stated in depictions.

The Claim for Obadiah

The third claim to investigate is Obadiah's desire to be fully identified as masculine.³¹ If the

28 Though on a historical level, no particular covenant is cited as having been broken. And the author of Obadiah brings enough charges that a historical covenant would most likely be mentioned if it existed.

29 Ignored by Obadiah and by scholars who write Christian commentaries and are interested in seeing Edom's condemnation as justified to in some way explicate the anger for forgiveness-oriented readers.

30 NB, this restoration will be to some of the Davidic kingdom lands, but not with a Davidic king.

31 Whether Obadiah has male sex organs is unknowable, and perhaps irrelevant. His sense of masculinity matters to this paper.

narrator can be said to be Obadiah who is the implied author, then *he* claims to be aggressive, confident, loyal, eloquent, persuasive, and protective in a patriarchal manner. As is typical of oracles against foreign nations, Obadiah does not appear as a character and is only a voice. The voice seemingly belongs to an aggressive and confident follower of Yahweh. *He* does not reproach all-Israel or Yahweh for what has happened. Instead, *he* confidently describes Yahweh's next move. Should this prophecy come true, the prophet would be elevated to true prophet (one whose prophecy has happened). Should the people of all-Israel hear this call to arms (the statement to rise up in verse 1) and respond, then the prophet would be the protector who rallied the troops.

As with other ancient writers, the author of Obadiah affirms eloquence and persuasiveness as masculine attributes. Albertz suggests that the oracles against foreign nations were originally war oracles meant to be performed before or during battle or in a cultic setting in which the enemy is symbolically destroyed.³² Such a situation would increase the importance of the poetic and rhetorical quality, especially in the call to battle in verse 1 and the promise of upcoming violence in verse 15 where the threat is arguably most explicit. The Old Testament scholar Robert Haak notes that most oracles against foreign nations start with a threat of violence. This allows the oracle to create an atmosphere of terror immediately.³³ L.C Allen finds the repetition of the phrases 'day of' and synonyms 'visitation,' 'calamity,' 'distress,' etc. act as "a series of verbal hammer blows designed to drive the message vigorously home."³⁴ This description of the language is itself very suggestive of male sexual aggression. The poetic language that this oracle shares with Jeremiah proves "to be an excellent vehicle for conveying that message."³⁵ In Jer 49:9-10 the poetry, "If grape-gatherers came to you,/would they not leave gleanings?/If thieves came by night,/even they would pillage only what they wanted./But as

32 Albertz, *Israel in Exile: The History and Literature of the Sixth Century B.C.E.*, 188.

33 Robert D. Haak. "Mapping Violence in the Prophets: Zephaniah 2." in *The Aesthetics of Violence in the Prophets*. Julia M. O'Brien, and Chris Franke, ed. (New York: T & T Clark, 2010), 27.

34 Quoted in Botha, "Social Values in the Book of Obadiah," 595.

35 Henk Potgieter. "A Poetic Analysis of the Book of Obadiah." *Old Testament Essays* 16, (2003): 667.

for me, I have stripped Esau bare,/I have uncovered his hiding places,/and he is not able to conceal himself,” is as striking as Obadiah verses 4 and 5.³⁶

The language has to be right, because this set of claims carries the connection between the implied author and the intended audience. The author, if this was written during the exile, is a *man* without a nation or a protective deity, and without the sense of masculine identity both of those conveyed. Presumably the intended audience were also followers of Yahweh in exile who needed to demonstrate and validate their identity. Albertz writes that for "the exiles but also to a lesser extent for those left behind, membership in the Judean community was no longer simply a given; it had to be demonstrated repeatedly in individual decisions."³⁷ One individual decision on the part of the author was to condemn Edom. Another individual decision on the part of the listener was to agree with and pray with that prophet. The masculine prophet would help them rebuild this identity. As Krause concludes, "God and the self, history and identity are not to be conceived all anew in a new situation, but within the context of the common story, which is to be continued."³⁸ The fact that this oracle was preserved and collected in the scroll of the Minor Prophets is perhaps a testimony to its reception by its intended audience and to their need for this message of identity.

The claim by the author for a masculine identity also demonstrates the human need for belonging. Biblical scholar Richard Schultz notes that prophets did not work in isolation but were part of a local community for whom they prophesied and part of the tradition of prophets.³⁹ Schultz draws on the theories of R.R. Wilson to propose that verbal similarity between prophets may be the result of both coming from the same community or of the latter one seeking acceptance and authority by

36 NRSV.

37 Albertz, *Israel in Exile: The History and Literature of the Sixth Century B.C.E.*, 137.

38 Krause, "Tradition, History, and Our Story: Some Observations on Jacob and Esau in the Books of Obadiah and Malachi," 486.

39 Richard L. Schultz. *The Search for Quotation: Verbal Parallels in the Prophets*. Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999, 100.

working in the language or perspective of a previous one.⁴⁰ Jeremiah and Joel may have been influential for the author of Obadiah, and so the author of Obadiah will work in their language and perspective to make *his* own claim to authority and express *his* oracle against Edom, a more consistently violent, revenge-oriented oracle. For Jeremiah in the oracle permits some Edomites to remain to be ruled over, and Joel in the oracle wants a return to worship. Obadiah does neither, taking the traditional language as a way to express threats to obliterate Edom.

Analysis of Claims

An exploration of the language aids in determining the validity of these claims. Many scholars who translated this book note do not address the way Edom's gender shifts in the oracle. In verse 1 Edom has female gender (her), and afterwards is consistently masculine. All the scholars who do their own translation note or footnote the shift's occurrence. It seems worthy of more than a footnote. It seems to indicate what is going on in the text. This pronoun reference is not to the city of Bozrah or Mount Seir, but to the nation. No other nation, city or mountain in Obadiah has a female gender. No female imagery is used for Edom. In Jer 49:14 a female pronoun is used for Bozrah (cities are often referred to by female pronouns in ancient texts).⁴¹ This may be a copyist's error. If so then the error happened on an early copy because all extant copies agree. Intentional or not, the effect of the use of a female pronoun for Edom in a call to battle is a taunting, so perhaps Obadiah is denigrating Edom's masculinity for Equality Matching. Perhaps Obadiah's sense of masculinity has broken down more than it seemed. Connell states that "Gender identities are plural, divided and may be unstable. Some gender processes operate at an unconscious level and some through impersonal processes in culture, such as language and symbolism."⁴² If so, then the author of Obadiah calls Edom her because *he* cannot be sure

40 Schultz, *The Search for Quotation: Verbal Parallels in the Prophets*, 82. He states that quotations are probably either to re-interpret the material or enhance one's own authority and gives examples of the parallels.

41 Nogalski, "Not Just Another Nation: Obadiah's Placement in the Book of the Twelve," 98.

42 Connell, "Arms and the Man: Using the New Research on Masculinity to Understand Violence and Promote Peace in the

which pronoun is the correct one in that line. The author also shifts between the second person plural pronoun for Edom and for Judah in verse 15.⁴³ This shift may be explained as intentional differences between the speakers of a cultic poem or it may be another instance of instability. That remains an open question, inasmuch as the text does not clarify how the oracle was to be used.

This shift in Edom's gender, like the shift from behavior rationalization on a mythic level (Jacob and Esau) to a historical one is only one of several shifts in the oracle. As Raabe notes, the anticipated destroyer of Edom shifts from the tribe of Jacob (Judah) to Edom's allies (presumably Mesopotamia and Moab) and back to Jacob. Another shift is that Edom's fate goes from being expelled to being entirely killed to being ruled over. Another shift is that the fate of Edom's land shifts from being occupied by foreigners to being occupied by Israel.⁴⁴ In Renkema's translation more than in other translations, the shift between verb tenses to show past and future action is clearer. As the verb tense shift becomes clearer, understanding of what has happened before and what is predicted ahead becomes less clear. For example, the tense in verse 11 is past and in verse 12 is present, though both perhaps refer to what has happened.

Anderson refers to the shifts in national relations as a reversal of fortune and suggests that these shifts have to do in part with metaphoric movement in the text.⁴⁵ Of course, the shifts could also be a sign of layers of editing, though scholars comparing Obadiah to Jeremiah 49 to look for redaction do not call that out.⁴⁶ These shifts may also be happening because the book of Obadiah is trying to work with material from other prophecies and so imports material that did not have strong consistency. No matter the cause, the shifts harm the claims to masculinity.

Contemporary World," 23.

43 Nogalski, "Not Just Another Nation: Obadiah's Placement in the Book of the Twelve," 95.

44 Raabe, *Obadiah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 15.

45 Bradford A. Anderson. "Poetic justice in Obadiah." *Journal For The Study Of The Old Testament* 35, no. 2 (December 1, 2010): 251.

46 All the scholars quoted elsewhere in Rainer Albertz, James Nogalski, and Jakob Wöhrle, eds. *Perspectives on the Formation of the Book of the Twelve: Methodological Foundations, Redactional Processes, Historical Insights*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012.

Taking into account all that has been evidenced, what can be said for the claims of masculinity in Obadiah? Yahweh's aspect as a male warrior god is no longer worshipped, so it is tempting to say that claim is false.⁴⁷ The protective father aspect of Yahweh is still worshipped, although so is the protective mother aspect. As a result, a modern reader may tend to negate the claim without analysis. Resisting this knee-jerk negation leads to a search for the proof of the prophetic claim. If this prophecy was made to give utterance to the feelings of impotence, loss and shame in the intended audience, then perhaps the prophetic claims were effective as catharsis rather than as prediction. If the prophecy was made to comment on Torah, then the claims are more difficult. Not all the male figures in Torah display the masculine attributes in Obadiah all the time. However, a strong, protective Yahweh establishes the land covenant with the strong patriarchs Abraham and Moses. If the author of Obadiah is prophesying that Yahweh will re-establish the land covenant on the Day of the Lord, that portion of the claim is not yet proven or dis-proven.

This prophecy may be meant to comment on the work of other prophets who have used "this military imagery of Yahweh's punishment, whether the attack of an army on the human level or a larger cosmological battle" as part of their prophetic idiom.⁴⁸ This book is not alone in the claim that Yahweh is a strong, decisive war leader. So for the intended audience that portion of the claim to masculinity was proven by standing with the other prophets, in terms of language and condemnation of Edom. For modern readers who want a more well-rounded depiction of Yahweh, this portion of the claim of masculinity fails.

Some scholars have claimed Obadiah was a true prophet because Edom was culturally obliterated by the Nabateans. Ernst Wendland and others from early criticism have ignored the fact that

47 While the aspect is still to be found in "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" and other Christian hymns, it is not commonly found in liturgical prayers.

48 Robert C. Culley. "Orality and Writteness in the Prophetic Texts." Ehud Ben Zvi and Michael H. Floyd, ed. *Writings and Speech in Israelite and Ancient near Eastern Prophecy*. Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000, 58.

Edom had its own god, instead portraying Edomites as errant followers of Yahweh who deserved condemnation.⁴⁹ Anderson claims that Edom's downfall would be justice served after the restoration.⁵⁰ The warrants underlying these judgments are that domination can be justified by wrongdoing, that neighboring states should be held accountable to mythic relations, and that the peaceful vision of restoration promised by other prophets is shared by Obadiah. The argument resting on the warrants is that Yahweh should serve justice on nations which have transgressed against fraternal nations through complete destruction of the offender's society and population. One finds it difficult to see how Christian, or any modern, scholars could agree with this argument.

In the work of these scholars, one senses overall reluctance to notice the following: that the Esau position would be justified in gloating and not helping after the hurt done to *him* by Jacob, that the restoration will be achieved only after the actual (non-mythic) people of Edom suffer a violent fate, that the author of Obadiah is more interested in re-possessing land than in peace, and that all-Israel never did stand up/rise up against Edom. Israel is in exile without a strong king or army for the rest of the diaspora. Its identity will come through domestic and synagogue piety, not through conquering other nations. These items overlooked allow scholars to come to a rosy, heteronormative understanding of the text that for many of them fits into a Christian eschatological hermeneutic.

Obadiah then may not be a proved-true-by-history prophet. So what about the author's claim for all-Israel's masculinity? The non-existence of an aggressor state of all-Israel after the Persian restoration of Jerusalem does damage the claim of the nation's masculinity; Yahweh does not covenant all the people to all of the land through a strong king (a patriarchal relation) again. The intended audience may feel masculine while listening to the oracle, but they are not made more masculine by the

49 Ernst Wendland. "Obadiah's Vision of 'The Day of the Lord': On the Importance of Rhetoric in the Biblical Text and in Bible Translation." *Journal of Translation and Textlinguistics* 7, (1996): 54-86.

50 Anderson, "Poetic Justice in Obadiah," 251. He believes the restoration in verses 19 to 21 will come about first. This allows him to perceive the violence as justice, not vengeance, as Israel would have a just ruler.

restoration under the Persians.

Finally, the claims of Obadiah for *his* own masculinity are made and perhaps felt by the intended audience, but are not proven by the other claims. The fall of Edom did not bring honor to this oracle through Yahweh's call to battle and ensuing victory. The oracle's language is eloquent but shifting and unstable, and it is violent but not leading to action, so his masculinity remains at least partly in exile.

Conclusion

Modern readers, including Pazdan, are not sure how to take this retribution theology; it resists any desire to read a peaceful expression of Yahweh's love, and it resists the author's desire to assert masculinity as Yahweh's/all-Israel's/the prophet's reality.⁵¹ Many, including the ones who decide the lectionary, have seen the violence and ignored the text altogether. Krause and Raabe have seen the vitriolic reference to Edom here and in the other prophets and assumed Edom was a semi-mythic bad guy for all-Israel which allowed them room for a larger theology of a just God.⁵² Despite this attempt to posit that Edom was metaphorical shorthand for bad guy, this oracle is against the real nation of Edom and lays real charges.⁵³ One can then try to find a theological statement based on an appeal to the Lord for violence to correct a relationship. The author possibly did make such an appeal at some point before creating the oracle, but does not make an appeal in the oracle. Trying to look beyond the historical reality of these charges and negative feelings and beyond the perhaps partially proven gender claims does not yield a theological understanding. The theological understanding is in the moment of the prophetic claim and in the deep, violent feelings presented as acceptable to the Lord. In that moment the author of Obadiah, like all other humans projecting feelings and judgments onto Yahweh,

51 Pazdan, "Obadiah," 590-591.

52 Krause, "Tradition, History, and Our Story: Some Observations on Jacob and Esau in the Books of Obadiah and Malachi," 486. and Raabe, *Obadiah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 43.

53 Nogalski, "Not Just Another Nation: Obadiah's Placement in the Book of the Twelve," 90.

can only reveal a partial truth of either Yahweh or human beings.

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