

The Spatial Rhetoric of Obadiah

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1. Introduction

It has long been noted that Obadiah, in spite of its brevity, is a difficult and complex book. Indeed, as far back as Jerome it was noted that the book's difficulties seem to be in inverse proportion to its size (Migne 1845). This complexity stems in part from historical questions, such as those related to the setting and date of the book, as well as its various textual difficulties (on these issues, consult Fohrer 1966; Snyman 1989; Nogalski 1993; Ben Zvi 1996; Lescow 1999; Assis 2014). However, another aspect that makes Obadiah such a compelling text are the various literary and ideological issues found therein, and the way in which these contribute to the book and its rhetorical force. One such dimension of Obadiah, and one which I would suggest has not received due attention, is the spatial rhetoric of this prophetic book.

It is clear, even from a cursory reading, that space and place play a significant role in Obadiah: this is a text that is very (perhaps ultimately) concerned with 'the land'. However, spatial theory has reminded us that spaces and places are more than neutral backdrops. They are, rather, intimately tied to broader social and cultural dimensions of life and need to be considered as such. What aspects of Obadiah's spatial rhetoric emerge when we examine the text in light of this broader understanding of space and place? In order to begin answering this question, I will focus on three interrelated issues: first, the complex way in which Obadiah highlights the relationship between place and identity; second, the idyllic language prominent toward the end of the book which stresses repossession of and return to the land; and third, the presentation of spatial cues, directionality, and movement in this text-world, elements which contribute to the book's vision of a reversal of fortune for Edom and Judah. Following on from this I will explore the implications of these findings in relation to their interpretive significance; in what ways does the spatial rhetoric of Obadiah inform our

reading of this short text? I will suggest that as much as spatial theory encourages us to investigate space and place from a variety of perspectives, so too the results of such enquiry may open up various interpretive possibilities. I begin, however, with some introductory reflections on spatial studies and the Bible.

2. Place, Space, and the Bible

Over the past several decades, biblical scholars have begun to engage more seriously with the ‘spatial turn’ evident in the broader humanities and social sciences (see LeFebvre 1974, trans. 1991; Soja 1989; Massey 2005; Cresswell 2004; on the complex relationship of ‘place’ and ‘space’ see Agnew 2011). A significant development in the nuanced approach to spatial study that emerged in the twentieth century was the idea that space and place represent more than abstract, static backgrounds for other dimensions of life. Rather, spatial issues can and should be interrogated from a variety of different perspectives because ‘like history and society, space is not encountered as a transparent or objective “reality”, but is constructed in social practice’ (Camp 2002: 64). Henri Lefebvre’s important work (1974) suggested that space should be considered in terms of spatial practice, representations of space, and representational spaces; that is, ‘space exists in a material sense, it is conceived and given meaning in thought, ... and space is lived in by people for whom the materiality and conceptions of space are both opportunity and limit’ (Stewart 2012: 142). A key component of thinking of spatial issues in this way is the recognition that how space and place are understood is perspectival. As Berquist comments, ‘The question of “where” always requires the question “according to whom.” ... There is no magical space to stand from which one can observe space without perspective. There is no terminology that one can use to speak of space neutrally. Thus, any talk of space is talk of meaning—the meaning that interpreters attach to space’ (Berquist 2002: 22).

The implications of these insights have begun to take root in biblical studies (Gunn & McNutt 2002; Berquist & Camp 2007; Berquist & Camp 2008; Prinsloo & Maier 2014). It has long been recognized that place, geography, and the land are foundational issues right through the Bible, and drawing on the insights of spatial studies has allowed these texts to be

read with fresh perspective. Who is naming, claiming, constructing, or speaking about the spaces and places found in the biblical material? Whose perspective(s) are we given, and what are the implications when this is recognised?

A further challenge faced by those who wish to interrogate the spatial dimensions of biblical literature is that, more often than not, we are working solely with written constructs, many of which have been shaped, altered, and edited over vast periods of time. We are not just dealing with descriptions of geographical sites, but of ‘representational’ worlds that have been interpreted, re-envisioned, and sometimes simply created (Camp 2002). And yet, even in these instances, spatial dimensions are present and need to be taken seriously. Commenting on the idea of ‘literary spaces’, Meredith notes that ‘Texts build worlds; they create imaginative landscapes for characters and readers to inhabit. These literary spaces structure our experience of a text, they form part of the text’s attempts to communicate meaning, and they are no less socially and ideologically charged than their “real-world” counterparts’ (Meredith 2012: 366; see also Tuan 1991). He continues, noting that ‘Reading literary spaces can help us better see what a text itself is trying to cope with, how its constructions and re-figurations of the world betray the thoughts that live their lives just below the surface’ (366). The issues noted by Meredith seem particularly relevant when reading Obadiah, a text which appears to be concerned not only with geographical locations, but which also is envisioning a spatially reordered world. Thus, examining Obadiah’s spatial rhetoric will include asking how Obadiah speaks of ‘real world’ places and locations, but will also entail examining what sort of world this prophetic text creates and envisions.

There are, then, a number of relevant issues that have come to the fore as scholars have begun to take seriously the spatial dimensions of biblical texts, and it is not difficult to imagine how these issues might be relevant in reading Obadiah. As noted above, it is clear that issues of the land are central to Obadiah’s concerns. But in what way are these places and spaces described, named, or laid claim to in Obadiah? What perspectives underlie the text’s assumptions about the land? And what kind of text-world does this book envision? It is with these questions in mind that we turn to Obadiah and its rhetoric of place and space.

3. Obadiah, Place, and Identity

Obadiah's focus on place, land and location comes through in a variety of ways, but one interesting motif is the complex way in which the text highlights the relationship between place and identity. (In what follows, all translations are my own.)

To begin with, the book opens by noting that Edom will be made 'least among the nations' (v. 2), introducing Edom as a key 'character' in the text. In what follows, Edom, its land, and its inhabitants are spoken of in a variety of ways that highlight the interrelationship of place and identity. In v. 3, we see the close relationship between location and inhabitants when we read that 'the ones living in the cleft of the rock the one dwelling in the heights' will be brought low, a reference to the inhabitants of the land of Edom known for its mountainous terrain (Bartlett 1989). In v. 9 an urban centre in Edom, Teman, is spoken to directly, again with reference to its inhabitants: 'Your warriors will be shattered, Teman'. The text also draws on ancestral associations, commenting that 'Esau', the traditional ancestor of Edom according to the biblical tradition, has been (or will be) pillaged (v. 6), while later in the book reference is made to the downfall of 'Mount Esau' (vv. 19, 21), as well as 'the house of Esau' (v. 18). When taken together, these references to Esau seem to indicate that both territory and inhabitants are in mind, and the two are not easily separated.

There is, then, a complex relationship between geographical location and inhabitants in Obadiah, particularly with reference to Judah's neighbour Edom. While we have direct reference to Edom, we also have reference to inhabitants associated with geographical markers ('the heights') and specific locations ('Teman'), as well as the invocation of ancestral associations ('Esau') which reinforce the connection between people and place. As one progresses through the text there is a sense that place and identity are bound together in an intimate manner, and the downfall of Edom is assumed to involve both its land and its people.

Similar themes can be found in the way in which Obadiah refers to Judah and Jerusalem, though with some subtle differences. For example, v. 11 introduces Jerusalem, commenting on the fact that 'foreigners entered his gate and cast lots concerning Jerusalem', the possessive suffix on 'gate' referring back to Edom's 'brother Jacob' in v. 10. The next

two Jerusalem-related references are telling. First, Edom is rebuked for this action in v. 13, where we read, ‘you should not have entered the gate of my people’. Then, in v. 16 the perspective shifts by noting YHWH’s possession of the land, chastising Edom for ‘drinking on my holy mountain’. Here the text introduces two important elements: particularity, with reference to ‘my people’, and the claim that Israel’s God is connected with their holy land (‘my holy mountain’). When taken together—‘his gate’, ‘the gate of my people’, ‘my holy mountain’—these references again indicate that people, place, and (in this case) particularity are bound together in complex fashion. As will be discussed below, it is very clear by the end of the book that, as is the case with Edom, Obadiah’s envisioned restoration of Judah/Israel includes both land and people (see vv. 17-21; Renkema 2003).

This close connection between place and identity is reinforced by the fact that the book draws heavily on the notion of kinship between Jacob/Israel and Esau/Edom (vv. 6, 10-11, 18, 21), and the behaviour unbecoming of kin that Edom is said to have demonstrated (Wolff 1986; Jeremias 2007; on the possible historical development of this ‘brotherhood’ tradition, see Bartlett 1969; Ben Zvi 1996). We read, for example, in Obad. 10, that ‘For the slaughter and violence done to your brother Jacob, shame shall cover you, and you shall be cut off for ever’. Further, as noted above, v. 6 notes that ‘Esau’ has been pillaged, and in v. 8 ‘Edom’ and ‘Mount Esau’ are used in parallel, highlighting the connection of the land, the people of Edom and the descendants of Esau (Genesis 36; see Bartlett 1969; Langer 2009). Meanwhile, v. 18 brings together the house of Jacob, the house of Joseph, and the house of Esau, most probably juxtaposing the future of the (unified) kingdoms of Judah and Israel with that of Edom, but again drawing on ancestral language that is suggestive of lands and inhabitants. These references to kinship are necessarily bound up with identity and geography, and also introduce an ethical dimension: the neighbouring land and its inhabitants are portrayed as anything but brotherly. Edom is said to have watched strangers carry off their kin’s wealth, entered its gates, gloated over Israel’s misfortune and humiliation, and stood at the crossings to catch people out (vv. 10-14). While there are significant historical questions related to these assertions (Bartlett 1982; Ben Zvi 1996), it remains the case that in the world of the text, these issues of kinship, land, and identity are inextricably related (Renkema 2003).

In summary, one dimension of Obadiah's spatial rhetoric is the way in which people and places are closely connected, in relation both to Edom and to Judah/Jerusalem. Indeed, place is so intimately tied to notions of identity in Obadiah that boundaries between lands and inhabitants appear to be porous.

4. Repossessing and Returning (vv. 17-21)

Another way in which Obadiah's concern for land comes through is found in the book's closing verses. Here we find the book's emphasis on place coming to a climax with a focus on the repossession of the land.

To begin with, it is noteworthy that we find the recurring use of the root *yṛš* ('possess') in relation to Judah and its neighbours (Anderson 2011). In v. 17 we read, 'But on Mount Zion there will be escape, and it will be holy. And the house of Jacob will possess its possession.' There is a text-critical issue here in relation to the pointing of the final word. In BHS the word is pointed as a third-person masculine plural form of the noun *mwrš* in the construct state. Here the house of Jacob will possess 'their possession'. Those that opt to follow the MT include Renkema (2003) and Raabe (1996), and this reading is also followed by the translations of the NIV and NASB. However, a number of ancient versions (LXX, Peshitta, Vulgate) understood the term as a hifil participle and thus translated as 'those who had possessed them', or 'their dispossessioners'. This variant reading is followed by Wolff (1986) and Stuart (1987), as well as the NRSV. While broadly similar renderings, the latter option is suggestive of the possibility that Edom had indeed begun to settle in parts of Judah. This reading may account for how Edom is treated in relation to other regions in v. 19, where we read that 'the Negeb will possess Mount Esau' (a designation used only here in the HB, and probably a play on the more common name 'Mount Seir'). While other territories are mentioned in the following verses in relation to the reclamation of a 'greater Israel', Edom's fate is distinct in that while it lies outside the traditional boundaries of Israel, it too will be possessed. If Edom did make incursions into Judah, it would most likely have been in the region of the Negeb, which may account for this special status (Myers 1971; Beit-Arieh 1989;

Glazier-McDonald 1995; on the more complex question of whether or not there may be inner-Judahite issues at work in Edom-related hostility, see Knoppers 2001).

This focus on ‘possession’ in relation to Edom is worth further exploration, particularly in relation to the occurrence in v. 19a. I would suggest that the use of this term takes on greater significance when we take into account its usage elsewhere in the HB in relation to Israel and Edom, notably in texts relating to the conquest/acquisition of Canaan. For example, the root *yrš* is frequently used to refer to the land as an ‘inheritance’ or ‘possession’ for Israel, a gift given from YHWH (Deut. 1.8, 20, 21). Interestingly, the term is also used in several places in a *positive* sense in relation to Edom and the descendants of Esau. In detailing Israel’s journey along the Transjordan on the way to Canaan, Deut. 2.5 notes that the Israelites are not to try and take the land of Esau’s descendants, ‘for as a possession (*yršh*) to Esau I gave Mount Seir’. The same terms are found in Josh. 24.4, which reads: ‘I gave to Isaac Jacob and Esau, and I gave to Esau Mount Seir to possess (*lršt*) it, and Jacob and his sons went down to Egypt.’ Thus, there is a recurring theme, notably in Deuteronomy and Joshua, which depicts Edom’s land as a gifted possession in a manner similar to Israel’s possession of the land of promise, and the recurrence of possession -related terminology is striking. When read in light of these other texts, it could be suggested that Obadiah is drawing on well-known motifs of kinship and land inheritance to make a larger point: Edom’s failure to act in a brotherly manner, coupled with their disrespect for Israel’s own possession, will lead to Edom being dispossessed of their own land (see Isa. 34.11; Amos 9.11-12; Num. 24.18; cf. Anderson 2011; 2012).

The use of this *leitwort* intensifies in Obad. 19-20, with the root *yrš* being used explicitly three further times, and implicitly at least twice more in verbless clauses. Verse 19 reads:

the Negeb will possess Mount Esau,
and the Shephelah the Philistines;
and they will possess the field of Ephraim and the field of Samaria;
and Benjamin, Gilead.

The various designations used in v. 19 serve to further the ideas noted above. The second clause is verbless, with the notion of the Shephelah ‘possessing’ the Philistines implied rather than being stated explicitly. The Shephelah—again, a location seemingly used as representative of its inhabitants—is ‘the strip of foothills west of the Judean highlands and east of the coastal plain of Philistia’ (Raabe 1996: 259). The coastal lands of Philistia were considered part of the traditional land promises (Num. 34.6; Deut. 11.24; Josh. 1.4; 15.33-47), and so the notion of the Shephelah possessing the Philistines points again to a (re)possession that is perhaps drawing on conquest-related motifs.

The third clause of v. 19 is perhaps the most difficult to parse. Given the structure of these verses, one expects a subject, in this case Ephraim, to dispossess the object, Samaria (Wolff 1986). However, both nouns here have the direct object marker, suggesting that perhaps they should be seen as a continuation of the previous phrases. It could be, as Raabe notes, that the reader must supply the identity of the possessor in this case, and he suggests broadly the ‘main part of Judah located in the central highlands’ as the possible ‘possessor’ of both Ephraim and Samaria (Raabe 1996; cf. Barton 2001; on the reference to ‘Mount Ephraim’ in the LXX, see Wolff 1986).

As with the earlier Shephelah clause, the verb *yrš* is missing but implied in the reference to Benjamin’s possession of Gilead, the former referring here to the inhabitants of the tribal land in the north. Gilead refers to a stretch of land east of the Jordan River, associated with the Transjordan tribes Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh. Some have found the reference to Benjamin untenable (Wellhausen 1963; Wolff 1986); conquered and deported in the Assyrian era, Gilead seems to have come under Ammonite rule in the Babylonian period, and suggestions have been put forward that Benjamin should be read as the Ammonites, producing a reading whereby Gilead will possess the Ammonites (Duhm 1911). Nevertheless, there are some links between Benjamin and Gilead in the HB (1 Samuel 11; 31), and it has the most natural association given the directionality of the other locations mentioned in these verses. As Sweeney notes, ‘Insofar as 1-2 Chronicles continually identifies Judah and Benjamin as the tribes who survived the Assyrian deportations of northern Israel and who constitute the

remnant of Israel in the post-Assyrian period, this statement reflects the perspective of the late- or post-exilic period that Judah and Benjamin together would see to the restoration of all Israel to the land' (2000: 296).

Raabe summarises the places and movements in v. 19:

Verse 19 concretizes and particularizes the general promise given in v. 17b. The Judahites who were left in the land following the Babylonian deportations will fan out in all four directions... The arrangement of subjects and objects makes good geographical sense: the inhabitants of the Negeb move south (and east); those of the Shephelah move west; those of the central and main part of Judah possess the northern territory; and those of Benjamin proceed east. Apart from the first clause, the verse promises the repossession of Israel's entire land within the traditional borders. (Raabe 1996: 258; cf. Renkema 2003)

The use of locations continues in v. 20, as do the linguistic complexities. This verse states:

The exiles of this company [Halah?], of the sons of Israel
[will possess] the Canaanites to Zarephath;
and the exiles of Jerusalem who are in Sepharad,
will possess the cities of the Negeb.

Following the rabbis, Rashi understands v. 20 as having two subjects—the two groups of exiles—both of which possess cities in the Negeb. Other readings, however, try to make sense of two subjects with two separate 'possessions' (LXX, Targum Jonathan). Barthélemy (1992), Raabe (1996) and others follow this latter reading, suggesting a dropped phrase ('will possess') in the first clause as the reason for the lack of clarity in the text. This latter reading seems most plausible, with two groups of exiles and two 'possessions' in different parts of the land.

The term *hhl* in v. 20a is difficult, and has been understood in a number of ways (see discussions in Raabe 1996; Barton 2001). First, some have suggested an emendation that would make this a proper noun, Halah, referring to the Assyrian city to which northern exiles were taken (as in 2 Kgs 17.6 and 1 Chron. 5.26; see Renkema 2003 and BHS suggested amendment). Second, a defective spelling of the noun *hl*, meaning ‘wall’, ‘rampart’, or ‘territory’ has been suggested (Barthélemy 1992; Ben Zvi 1996). Finally, following the ancient versions (Targum Jonathan, Vulgate, LXX), the term has been understood as a defective spelling of *hyl*, ‘company, army’ (Rashi, for example, comments that the word is missing the yod). If the latter option is followed, , ‘this company’ would seem to refer to those from Judah mentioned in the previous verse, and the following clause (‘of the sons of Israel’) would then add further commentary on this description. The first option (referring to the city, Halah), has the advantage of offering a parallel location for the exiles referred to in the second half of the verse, who will return from Sepharad.

The reference to ‘Canaanites’ in v. 20a has again led to much discussion through the years. The LXX and Targum both render this as ‘land of the Canaanites’ (so Wolff [1986]: ‘the exiles of Israel’s sons [shall possess the land of the] Canaanites as far as Zarephath’), though it can also be read as a reference to those in exile who are referred to as Canaanites. However we reconstruct this difficult text, the reference to ‘Zarephath’, a city on the far northwest coast, suggests that the Phoenicians are in mind, and so the emphasis is clearly on the north. Indeed, Wolff’s reading remains a plausible one: the author/redactor ‘seems to see Galilee and Phoenicia as prepared for the homecomers from exile who had once belonged to the Northern Kingdom’ (Wolff 1986: 68).

The location of ‘Sepharad’ in v. 20b is a well-rehearsed issue. The LXX renders the term as ‘Ephratha’, the Vulgate opts for ‘Bosphorus’, and the Targum and Peshitta famously render the location as ‘Spain’. While other readings have been offered in the modern period, the most common today is ‘Sardis’, in modern Turkey (see discussion in Barton 2001; Lipinski 1973). As Raabe notes, in spite of the complexity of this unit, ‘the basic gist of the verse remains clear: even the Jerusalemites who dwell in the farthest regions will participate in Israel’s restoration’ (Raabe 1996: 268). That these exiles will take possession of the cities

of the Negeb is again not a self-explanatory statement. However, if the first half of the verse presents exiles taking possession of land far to the north, the latter half can be seen to complement this, focusing on the southern regions. Further, if Edomites were making incursions into Judahite territory during this period, the author might be making the claim that returning Jerusalemites will be dispossessing these lands from the Edomites.

Taken in sum, we find in v. 20 language that invokes an idealized past and, with the reference to ‘exiles’ and ‘possession’, one can quite easily see how a conquest-like re-emergence in the land might be in mind.

Thus, in spite of the difficulties with the various designations, when v. 19 and v. 20 are taken together, a larger picture begins to emerge: if v. 19 is concerned with those remaining in the land expanding and moving out to Israel’s ‘true’ (and indeed extended) borders, v. 20 draws those in exile back into the equation. When the larger contextual unit of vv. 17-21 is read in this light, the picture of Israel re-possessing its land is clearly idyllic: it not only employs archaic geographic and conquest-related terminology, but also uses the language of territories that would cover the four corners of an idealized ‘ancient’ Israel (whatever historical realities lie behind these), as well as incorporating Edom (Renkema 2003; Ben Zvi 1996). As Barton comments, this text speaks of ‘the glorious restoration of preexilic (even pre-721) “land of Israel” and its annexation of neighbouring territories to produce a kind of “Greater Israel”, whose boundaries would correspond roughly to those supposed in the Old Testament to have existed in the age of David’ (Barton 2001: 157). Here the focus on the restoration of Israel and the reincorporation of exiles corresponds with what was noted above regarding place and identity: the restoration of the people is necessarily bound up with the repossession of the land (Ezek. 37; Joel 3; Jer. 29; see Wolff 1986; Raabe 1996; Dicou 1994).

5. Spatial Cues, Directionality, and Movement in Obadiah

Thus far I have explored the close relationship of place and identity in Obadiah, as well as the idyllic language of return to and repossession of the land in the book’s closing verses.

Returning to the observations from Meredith noted above, it is also worth asking what sort of

text-world Obadiah creates with its spatial rhetoric. What ‘imaginative landscapes’ do we find that are ‘part of the text’s attempts to communicate meaning’ (Meredith 2012: 366)? One such issue relates to what we might refer to as the book’s use of spatial cues, that is, the ways in which directionality and action are described in the text. These dimensions, I suggest, offer a spatially reordered world which contributes to the way in which the text envisions a reversal of fortune for Judah and Edom.

One might first note that the book as a whole is framed by this idea of a reversal of (what seems to be) the current situation. Edom, known for its mountainous terrain (Mount Seir, Gen. 36.6-8; Bartlett 1989), is associated in several ways throughout Obadiah with ‘the heights’ and high places, and so the text makes prominent use of the imagery of ‘high’ and ‘low’. The book begins with a call for the nations to ‘rise up’ against Edom (v. 1), and this is followed in vv. 3-4 with the statement that ‘Your proud heart has deceived you, the one living in the clefts of the rock, whose dwelling is in the heights. You say in your heart, “Who will bring me down to the ground?”’ Though you soar like the eagle, though your nest is set among the stars, from there I will bring you, says YHWH.’ A further play on the idea of high and low is found in Obad. 4, where we are told that Edom’s nest ‘is set (*šym*) among the stars’. In Obad. 7b, it is noted that ‘those who ate your bread have set (*yšymw*) a trap under you’. Thus, Edom’s allies are ‘setting’ a trap under them, from below, even as Edom imagines itself as ‘set’ beyond reach in the heights. An alternative reading of *mzwr* in Obad. 7 is offered by McCarter (1976), who notes that this word, rendered as ‘trap’ above, can be read as the noun ‘stranger’. The sense of the verse is then, ‘they have set strangers to replace you’. The wordplays are still evident in this reading: while Edom ‘sets’ itself on the heights, her allies ‘set’ others under them. Moving to the book’s finale, the book comes to a climax with a proclamation concerning the restoration of Israel and Mount Zion (vv. 17-21). Verse 21 states that, ‘Those who have been saved will go up upon Mount Zion, to judge Mount Esau. And the kingdom will be for YHWH’. In many ways, then, the entirety of the book is structured around this movement—from the downfall of Edom to the concomitant restoration and exaltation of Zion and Israel. Verse 7 notes that Edom’s allies have deceived them and have sent (or will send) them to the border. The ‘sending’ which is done in this verse is

ambiguous, in part because it is unclear to whose border the text refers. The most likely sense, agreeing with Jer. 49.19, is that ‘the allies “expel” the Edomites from their cities and homes to the extremities of Edom’s land’ (Raabe 1996: 150). Again, Obadiah stresses that what Edom has done will be done to them, and there is little safety or comfort in their contemporary allies.

We find further spatial-related allusions to Edom’s future in light of their actions toward Judah in Obad. 14, which states, ‘You should not have stood at the crossings to cut off his fugitives; you should not have handed over his survivors on the day of distress’. We first note that Obad. 9 and 10 both use the root *krt*, ‘cut off’, to describe Edom’s future, mirroring the usage of Obad. 14. In Obad. 9-10 we read, ‘Your warriors shall be shattered, Teman, so that everyone from Mount Esau will be cut off. For the slaughter and violence done to your brother Jacob, shame shall cover you, and you shall be cut off forever.’ A further resonance with Obad. 14 occurs in Obad. 18b, which states, ‘there shall be no survivor of the house of Esau; for YHWH has spoken’. Taken together, we see that as Edom ‘cut off’ Judah’s fugitives (v. 14), so Edom will be ‘cut off’ (vv. 9-10). And as Edom handed over those ‘survivors’ from Judah’s day of calamity (v. 14), so Edom itself will have no ‘survivors’ (v. 18).

Verses 11-14 also offer a number of spatial and action-based references, based around the motif of ‘the day’. In v. 11 we read, ‘On the day that you stood aside, on the day that strangers carried off his wealth... you too were like one of them’. As the text progresses, however, it is clear that this ‘standing aside’ is a sin of omission, and the text implies that Edom’s inaction is comparable to its overt action. Indeed, it is interesting to note that there is a progression in the verbs used in these verses—‘stood aside, gloated, rejoiced, boasted, entered, joined, looted, handed over’—perhaps suggesting that the author perceives a trajectory in Edom’s deeds: what began as inaction grew to complicit action. The comeuppance for this complicity on ‘the day’ is found in vv. 15-17, where it is ‘the day of YHWH’ that is near for Edom and indeed the nations (Sweeney 2000; Raabe 1996).

These spatial cues reach their apex in the final verses of Obadiah as the focus shifts to Mount Zion. Not only will people return and ‘possess’ the land as noted above, but Mount Zion will be a place of escape (v. 17), and the saved will ‘go up’ to Mount Zion to rule Mount

Esau, a final sign that the kingdom is YHWH's. Even here, the spatial dimensions indicating reversal of fortune are evident, as Mount Zion will judge Mount Esau (v. 21). Thus Edom, known for its majestic heights, will be brought low, while Israel and its holy mountain will re-emerge to their place of pre-eminence.

In summary, the spatial language describing movement and action in the book of Obadiah envisions a spatially reordered world: what was high will be brought low; those who encroach on Judah's borders will be expelled to their own borders; those who cut off escapees will themselves be cut off; and in the end, it is Mount Zion that is exalted in the heights.

6. Place and Space in Obadiah: Interpretive Trajectories

As noted at the outset, spatial theory has reminded us that place and space represent much more than neutral locations or backgrounds, but function in numerous ways related to social, cultural and political realities. The foregoing discussion suggests that this is indeed the case with Obadiah, as an investigation of the book's spatial rhetoric has highlighted 1) the complex interrelationship of place and identity, 2) the idyllic language of repossessing and returning found in the book's final verses, and 3) the language of movement, directionality, and action that envisions a spatially reordered world for Judah and Edom.

The question remains, however, as to how this might impact the way in which Obadiah is read and understood. It was noted above that 'any talk of space is talk of meaning—the meaning that interpreters attach to space' (Berquist 2002: 22). If this is the case, then how might the preceding discussion inform one's interpretation of Obadiah? I offer here two possible interpretive trajectories for making sense of Obadiah's spatial rhetoric: one centred on issues of identity and exclusivity, the other on Obadiah as a text emerging from trauma.

Identity, Particularity, and Exclusion

One key issue that emerges from the reading offered above is the relationship of place and identity. Not surprisingly, spatial theorists have been quick to note the strong interrelationship that exists between place and identity. As Hunziker, Buchecker, and Hartig (2007) comment,

As soon as a place reminds an individual of the main features of his or her identity (social belonging and qualities, individual abilities and qualities, cultural values), that individual can rebuild and thus regulate his or her identity, which is necessary after even slight setbacks in everyday life. And as identity development is a life-long process, a person may not feel well at a place unless he or she can periodically re-appropriate the place, which allows that person to update and develop his or her identity. (54)

The realisation that place and identity are intimately related is not a new one (Tuan 1991). What is relevant for the present study, however, is the way in which Obadiah's language of place belies a specific *perspective* about Israelite/Judahite identity which is particularistic in nature. As Schwartz (1997) points out in relation to the HB more broadly,

Despite the haunting protests that frequent the biblical narratives against Israel ever becoming a nation 'like the nations', and despite the frequent celebrations of nomadism that punctuate the narratives, ancient Israel has bequeathed to later generations in far-flung climes the authoritative grand myth that will be used and misused by nations, ethnic groups, and religious communities for their own purposes. In this apparently compelling myth of identity, the divine promise of land to a people creates them as a people. (41)

Schwartz continues, commenting that 'there is a dangerous consequence of attaching identity to territory: when a people imagines itself as the people of a given land, the obvious threat to its identity is loss of that land' (44). In Obadiah, then, as elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, it is the interrelationship of identity, the land, and divine chosenness that makes the question of

place such a complex issue and, to corroborate Schwartz's concerns, the loss of the land appears to be intimately related to questions of identity and otherness.

This interrelationship of identity, land, and election, confirms what others have noted in relation to Obadiah: that there are ideological issues at work in this text which reflect 'the Second Temple community's ideology of claims to the land' (Stiebert 2002b: 42). Thus, as O'Brien (2008) argues, 'the land' (along with the notion of kinship) is used in the context of Obadiah as an (unfounded) ideological tool meant to further ostracize 'others' while consolidating the post-exilic Judean community. These various elements can be seen quite clearly in the way in which Obadiah refers to Jerusalem as belonging both to the people and to God, how it envisions the humiliation of Edom, as well as in the book's use of language which visualizes a return to an idealized, greater Israel.

Taking on board these observations, it is clear how Obadiah's rhetoric of place and space can be seen to fit into a larger pattern of exclusivity in the Hebrew Bible that includes the land. The prediction of an idyllic, restored Israel in its most robust state implies the displacement not only of Edomites, many of whom we can assume were innocent of any broader systemic crimes that might have occurred (if any, see Bartlett 1982), but also of countless 'others' who find themselves in the unenviable position of living in places which Obadiah hopes will be (re-)appropriated. In this sense, Obadiah's spatial rhetoric might lead one to situate the book alongside numerous other difficult texts in the Hebrew canon that correlate place, identity, and particularity in ways which suggest that scarcity—of land, of divine favour, of room for self and other—is a dominant, and perhaps dangerous, perspective (Schwartz 1997).

Text and Trauma

On one level, then, it is clear how the rhetoric of space and place in Obadiah might encourage readers to see this text as simply ethnocentric and land-centred xenophobia (Carroll 1990). However, there are other ways in which these spatial elements can be interpreted. For example, the manner in which the text deals with issues of space and place has a number of

parallels with insights drawn from work done on trauma theory and biblical texts, pointing to other interpretive possibilities that complicate the picture outlined above.

As Kelle notes, ‘trauma’ is recognised as ‘an experience of one or more catastrophic events that can produce several kinds of disruptive responses, as well as both conscious and unconscious ways of reliving the experience’ (Kelle 2009: 483). The list of what might constitute trauma is long, but includes war, terror, and forced displacement. In spite of the fact that our sources for the period are less prevalent than we might like (Becking 2011), scholars in recent years have begun to use social-scientific work done in trauma studies to explore the effects of the events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem and the deportations to Babylon in the sixth century BCE (see Kelle 2011; Smith-Christopher 2011; Carr 2014 and relevant literature cited in these). Kelle notes that,

These events were traumatic because they were physically, psychologically, socially and theologically destabilizing... The experiences were not simply those of a Babylonian siege and conquest; they were the loss of a divinely promised land, the destruction of a temple that represented God’s presence, the end of a divinely sanctioned royal dynasty, and the apparent defeat of the very God on whose word the whole construct rested. (Kelle 2009: 483)

This comparative work is not without its difficulties (Smith-Christopher 2011), but it has led to some intriguing findings; it is not hard to imagine, for example, how the following description of trauma experienced by contemporary refugees might resonate with those who have experienced destruction of their land and forced displacement in biblical contexts:

Groups experiencing the trauma...often attempt to place such suffering in a meaningful frame of reference, with particularly well-documented tendencies toward self-blame on the one hand...and enhancement of radical nationalism on the other... The instability of identity in such situations often leads to a new focus on creating a

history that locates the individual and his/her group, a history through which the person/group is defined by who *they were*. (Carr 2011a: 229)

This has serious implications for how individuals and communities coping with trauma engage with ‘others’, as a focus on identity rooted in the past, along with enhanced nationalism, often leads to stronger notions of identity that separate between ‘us’ and ‘them’ (Carr 2011b; cf. Smith-Christopher 2002).

Along with notions of identity rooted in the past and in nationalism, those suffering from trauma also attempt to rebuild some semblance of order and hope that has been lost in traumatic events. A significant aspect of this is a fixation on the homeland; citing studies on Palestinian refugees, Carr notes that ‘In the absence of land, they hold ever more tightly onto the idea of land’ (Carr 2011b: 303). This focus on the land suggests renewed interest in another familiar trope, the concept of return: ‘People reconstructing hope in the wake of the trauma of forced displacement often focus in particular on the prospect of *return*. This, for many exiles, is the incarnation of hope’ (Carr 2011b: 301).

The issues outlined here map quite well on to Obadiah in terms of a response to the events of the Babylonian conquest: a redefining of self and community in terms of the past, increasing nationalism, and a focus on a return to the homeland are all issues that feature prominently in this brief prophetic text. Kelle comments that survivors of trauma have to bring their experience ‘to coherent expression by reworking elements of their story in such a way that it incorporates the traumatic into a larger, meaningful context’ (2009: 484), and the spatial rhetoric of this text might indicate that Obadiah is such an attempt.

Competing Spatialities and Contradictory Richness

We have, then, what seem to be quite distinct interpretive trajectories that can emerge from an interrogation of Obadiah’s rhetoric of place and space, even if similar themes are highlighted. On the one hand, such an exploration suggests that the text’s exclusivistic tone is related to the fact that identity, particularity, and land are tied too closely together. Those interested in questions of identity and exclusion are understandably concerned with how

Obadiah might be used in light of these issues (O'Brien 2008), and the text has indeed been used in exclusivistic ways down through the centuries (see Anderson 2014). On the other hand, reading Obadiah's spatial rhetoric in the light of trauma studies suggests that Obadiah may be a text with traumatic origins, reflecting an attempt to cope with significant loss. These are texts forged in defeat (Wolff 1977; Wright 2009), and the voicing of anger and injustice might even be seen as an act of catharsis (Rumfelt 2011; Classens 2012).

Where to from here? It is worth keeping in mind that these issues are not unique to biblical studies, and dialogue with other fields might prove instructive. For example, in a thought-provoking piece exploring modern literature from the vantage point of textual geography, Oakes (1997) notes that much contemporary work in this field is concerned with what he labels 'place-as-site-of-resistance' narratives, focusing on a recovery of how places have resisted dominant ideologies. Oakes's concern with this trend is that it has the tendency of minimizing the contradictions and ambivalences of lived experience that are a very real part of space and place in such literature. He writes that his objective 'is not to deny the importance of place as a terrain of struggle and resistance. Such a claim would fly in the face of some of the best work being done in human geography today.' Rather, his aim is 'to recover a less essential notion of place not necessarily allied with the geopolitics of resistance but as an unstable terrain which in fact problematizes not only hegemony and domination but resistance as well' (Oakes 1997: 525). Oakes goes on to note that, 'Place is indeed a terrain of struggle. But the struggles over place cannot be conceived simply in terms of resisting historical and spatial hegemonies.' Rather, he concludes, place 'fundamentally represents a geography of modernity in all its contradictory richness' (Oakes 1997: 520).

The conclusions drawn by Oakes with regard to textual geography and modern literature would seem to have significant relevance for those investigating the spatial dimensions of biblical texts. Indeed, there are potential parallels with the reading of Obadiah offered above. Oakes's warning that scholars of modern literature need to consider the spatial dynamics of both hegemony and resistance might indicate that those exploring the spatial dimensions of Obadiah need to allow for a similar 'unstable terrain' and 'contradictory richness': a close reading of Obadiah that considers the spatial rhetoric of the text might well

highlight exclusive ideologies of identity and land, while also revealing marks of trauma. To be sure, some might prefer one reading to another. Nevertheless, the possibility of a plurality of perspectives should not be surprising. As Flanagan notes, contemporary spatial theories which draw attention to the contested nature of space and place ‘suggest that competing spatialities co-exist’ (Flanagan 1999: n.p.), and this surely applies as much to interpretive endeavours attempting to make sense of ancient texts as it does to contested spaces in the realm of lived experience. Thus, we might think of these interpretive trajectories emerging from Obadiah’s spatial rhetoric as competing spatialities that allow for contradictory richness, readings which highlight the diverse ways in which space and place can be understood, while also pointing to the contested nature of biblical interpretation.

7. Conclusions

This study has sought to explore the spatial rhetoric of Obadiah. Following a brief overview of the emerging significance of spatial theory within biblical studies, I have offered a reading of place and space in Obadiah centred around three motifs: 1) the sustained way in which the book highlights the connection between place and identity, 2) the idyllic language of return to and repossession of the ‘greater’ land of Israel found in the book’s final verses, and 3) the spatial language of movement, directionality, and action that envisions a spatially reordered world for Judah and Edom. From here two interpretive trajectories were put forward: when read in light of concerns for identity, scarcity, and exclusivity, it is clear to see how Obadiah’s spatial rhetoric contributes to a reading of the text that highlights exclusive ethnocentrism. However, when this same rhetoric of space and place is read in light of theoretical frameworks such as those exploring trauma, a different picture emerges pointing toward an author or community coping with significant loss. In the end, I have suggested that we might think of these interpretive trajectories as reflecting the complex ways in which place and space can be understood, an example (to borrow again from Flanagan and Oakes) of competing spatialities that allow for contradictory richness.

As noted at the outset, Jerome once quipped that Obadiah’s difficulties seem to be in inverse proportion to its size (*‘quanto brevis est, tanto difficilior’*, Migne 1845: 1100). The

present research indicates that Jerome's ancient dictum can be applied as much to Obadiah's spatial rhetoric as to the book's various other complexities.