**Taken from** [**https://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/places/main-articles/edom on Jan 24**](https://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/places/main-articles/edom%20on%20Jan%2024)**, 2021.**

**Edom**by [Brad Anderson](https://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/places/main-articles/edom#contrib_anderson-brad)

Israel and Judah have plenty of enemies in the [Hebrew Bible](https://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/places/main-articles/edom). Some of these are more well-known than others, including powerful empires of the ancient world such as Egypt and Babylon. But Israel and Judah also had complex relationships with a number of their smaller neighbors, and none more so than their neighbor Edom. Edom was a kingdom based in the territory to the south and east of the Dead Sea, covering parts of modern day Israel and Jordan. Known for its mountainous terrain, it is also closely associated with the hill country of [Seir](https://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/places/main-articles/edom) in the Hebrew Bible ([Gen 32:3](https://www.bibleodyssey.org/lightbox-bible-passage.aspx?passage=Gen+32%3a3); [Gen 36:8](https://www.bibleodyssey.org/lightbox-bible-passage.aspx?passage=Gen+36%3a8)). Part of the region would later become known as Idumea, a designation that is found in the [New Testament](https://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/places/main-articles/edom) ([Mark 3:8](https://www.bibleodyssey.org/lightbox-bible-passage.aspx?passage=Mark+3%3a8)).

**Why is the Hebrew Bible so negative about Edom?**

The inhabitants of Edom—the Edomites—are said to be the descendants of Esau, the twin brother of Jacob ([Gen 25-36](https://www.bibleodyssey.org/lightbox-bible-passage.aspx?passage=Gen+25-36)). Because of this association, the Edomites came to be considered as Israel’s kin, and the term “brother” is used in relation to the Edomites or the descendants of Esau in several places ([Num 20:14](https://www.bibleodyssey.org/lightbox-bible-passage.aspx?passage=Num+20%3a14); [Deut 2:4-5](https://www.bibleodyssey.org/lightbox-bible-passage.aspx?passage=Deut+2%3a4-5); [Amos 1:11](https://www.bibleodyssey.org/lightbox-bible-passage.aspx?passage=Amos+1%3a11); [Obad 1:10](https://www.bibleodyssey.org/lightbox-bible-passage.aspx?passage=Obad+1%3a10)).

Like their ancestors Jacob and Esau, the Israelites and the Edomites had a tumultuous relationship. The Hebrew Bible recounts several episodes in the history of these nations where friction can be seen, including King David’s military victory over Edom as told in [2Sam 8:13-14](https://www.bibleodyssey.org/lightbox-bible-passage.aspx?passage=2Sam+8%3a13-14) (see also [2Kgs 8:20-22](https://www.bibleodyssey.org/lightbox-bible-passage.aspx?passage=2Kgs+8%3a20-22); [2Chr 28:16-17](https://www.bibleodyssey.org/lightbox-bible-passage.aspx?passage=2Chr+28%3a16-17)).

However, it is during and after the [Babylonian](https://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/places/main-articles/edom) conquest of Judah and Jerusalem in the sixth century BCE that Edom seems to become an exemplary villain in the Hebrew Scriptures. A number of biblical texts from this era indicate that Edom was complicit in the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem ([Obad 1:10-14](https://www.bibleodyssey.org/lightbox-bible-passage.aspx?passage=Obad+1%3a10-14); [Ezek 35:1-5](https://www.bibleodyssey.org/lightbox-bible-passage.aspx?passage=Ezek+35%3a1-5); [Ps 137:7](https://www.bibleodyssey.org/lightbox-bible-passage.aspx?passage=Ps+137%3a7)) and that the Edomites began to settle in the southern parts of Judah. At the very least, these texts indicate that Edom did not act in a way that would be expected of a sibling in this time of distress. Because of this, the writings from this period have harsh words for their neighboring country, a theme that is particularly prominent in the prophetic literature ([Isa 34](https://www.bibleodyssey.org/lightbox-bible-passage.aspx?passage=Isa+34); [Ezek 35](https://www.bibleodyssey.org/lightbox-bible-passage.aspx?passage=Ezek+35); [Obad 1:1-21](https://www.bibleodyssey.org/lightbox-bible-passage.aspx?passage=Obad+1%3a1-21); [Mal 1:1-5](https://www.bibleodyssey.org/lightbox-bible-passage.aspx?passage=Mal+1%3a1-5)).

**Did Edom deserve all this negative press?**

The harsh depiction in the prophets is the most well-known aspect of Edom’s portrayal in the Hebrew Bible. But is this what Edom should be most remembered for, and did it deserve this severe representation?

It is worth noting that, while these negative portrayals are most common, there are also surprisingly positive elements to Edom’s story in the Hebrew Bible. One prominent example is found in [Deut 2:4-5](https://www.bibleodyssey.org/lightbox-bible-passage.aspx?passage=Deut+2%3a4-5), as the Israelites make their way toward the land of [promise](https://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/places/main-articles/edom) after their time in the wilderness. Here the Israelites are told that the descendants of Esau have been given their land as a gift from Israel’s God, in the same way that Canaan is to be given as a gift to Israel (see also [Josh 24:4](https://www.bibleodyssey.org/lightbox-bible-passage.aspx?passage=Josh+24%3a4)). In fact, Deuteronomy indicates that Israel’s God helped the Edomites in taking possession of this territory. There are also texts that closely associate Israel’s God with Seir and Edom, even suggesting that [YHWH](https://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/places/main-articles/edom) came from this region ([Judg 5:4](https://www.bibleodyssey.org/lightbox-bible-passage.aspx?passage=Judg+5%3a4); [Deut 33:2](https://www.bibleodyssey.org/lightbox-bible-passage.aspx?passage=Deut+33%3a2)). Thus, the picture of Edom and the Edomites does have some positive dimensions (see also [Deut 23:7-8](https://www.bibleodyssey.org/lightbox-bible-passage.aspx?passage=Deut+23%3a7-8)).

Questions have also been raised in recent decades about Edom’s supposed role in the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem at the time of the Babylonian conquest. There is no evidence outside of the Bible for Edom’s role in these events, and the biblical evidence for such complicity is vague and sparse ([Ps 137:7](https://www.bibleodyssey.org/lightbox-bible-passage.aspx?passage=Ps+137%3a7)). Further, some of the sources that give specific details of Edom’s role took shape quite some time after the events themselves ([1Esd 4:45](https://www.bibleodyssey.org/lightbox-bible-passage.aspx?passage=1Esd+4%3a45)). Because of this, a number of scholars have suggested that Edom became an undeserving [scapegoat](https://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/places/main-articles/edom) in the exilic and [postexilic](https://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/places/main-articles/edom) eras, an easy target for Judah’s many frustrations and concerns after the Babylonian conquest. Others maintain, however, that this widespread anti-Edom tradition must have come from somewhere, and the idea that it emerged without any historical basis is unlikely.

Whether deserved or not, Edom is remembered in the biblical record as the sibling who doesn’t live up to family expectations.

*Brad Anderson, "Edom", n.p. [cited 24 Jan 2021]. Online:*[*https://www.bibleodyssey.org:443/en/places/main-articles/edom*](https://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/places/main-articles/edom)

**Contributors**



[**Brad Anderson**](https://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/tools/contributors?ID=%7b80938EB6-6641-4167-A158-E561C19CA5EB%7d#anderson-brad)  
Lecturer, Dublin City University

Brad Anderson is lecturer in biblical studies at Dublin City University, Ireland. His research focuses on the Pentateuch and the prophetic literature, as well as biblical reception history. Publications include *Brotherhood and Inheritance: A Canonical Reading of the Esau and Edom Traditions*(T&T Clark, 2011) and *An Introduction to the Study of the Pentateuch* (Bloomsbury, 2017).