

Notes on Obadiah

2 0 1 7 E d i t i o n

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Introduction

TITLE AND WRITER

As is true of all the other prophetic books in the Old Testament, the title of this one evidently comes from the name of its writer. "Obadiah" means "servant of Yahweh" or "worshipper of Yahweh," depending on the form (vocalization) of his name in Hebrew, which is debated. There are 13 men who bear this name in the Old Testament, from Davidic to postexilic times, assuming the writer was not one of the other 12. It appears that he was not, since attempts to identify him with one of the others have proved unsatisfying.

A few scholars have favored the view that this "Obadiah" was not the name of an individual but a symbolic title of the writer who was an unidentified servant or worshipper of the Lord. This seems unlikely since the other prophetic books bear the proper names of their writers. Some scholars believe that Malachi ("my servant") is also a title rather than a proper name.

Exactly who Obadiah was, remains a mystery. Keil believed that the Obadiah who served King Ahab and who encountered Elijah (1 Kings 18:3-16) was the writer.¹ Usually something about the writer accompanies his name at the beginning of each prophetic book, generally his father's name, some of his ancestors, and or his hometown. This descriptive information is absent in only two of the prophetic books: Obadiah and Malachi.

Whoever Obadiah was, he possessed significant literary talent. He employed the skills of imagery, rhetorical questions, irony, repetition, and various forms of parallelism in his brief prophecy.

UNITY

Some scholars have contended that this small book, the shortest one in the Old Testament but not in the Bible, is a collection of prophecies that two or more unidentified prophets uttered. There are two reasons for this view. First, since the identity of Obadiah is obscure, some students of the book have concluded that "Obadiah" is a title that describes prophets in general, as servants of the Lord, rather than the name of one specific individual. Second, the content of the book may consist of from two to five oracles. Form

¹C. F. Keil, "Obadiah," in *The Twelve Minor Prophets*, 1:337.

critics have identified three types of oracles: oracles of judgment, oracles of repentance, and oracles of salvation.² This has led some scholars to posit two or more prophecies and two or more prophets.

However, since "Obadiah" was a common Hebrew name, and since the other prophetic books bear the names of their writers, it is more natural to assume that one prophet named Obadiah wrote the whole book. Furthermore, since many other writing prophets recorded several oracles, it is reasonable to assume that one prophet named Obadiah did the same in this book if, indeed, it consists of more than one oracle. The whole brief book fits together nicely as a single composition.³

DATE

Since we do not know who the writer was, other than that his name appears to have been Obadiah, it is very difficult to date this book and to determine where it came from.

"This shortest book in the Old Testament, consisting of only twenty-one verses, bears the distinction of being the most difficult of all the prophecies to date."⁴

There are three clues concerning when the prophet wrote it: references to historical events in the book, the book's place in the Hebrew canon, and possible quotations or allusions to the writings of other Old Testament prophets in Obadiah, and quotations or allusions to Obadiah in other Old Testament books.

First, Obadiah referred to a time in the apparently recent past when the Edomites had gloated over a successful invasion of Jerusalem (vv. 10-14, 16). There are at least seven occasions during the ministry of the writing prophets when we know Jerusalem experienced invasion and suffered a defeat. One of these is probably the event he referred to.

1. During Rehoboam's reign (930-913 B.C.; 1 Kings 14:25-26; 2 Chron. 12:2-9)
2. During Jehoram's reign (853-841 B.C.; 2 Kings 8:20-22; 2 Chron. 21:8-10, 16-17; cf. Amos 1:6)
3. During Amaziah's reign (796-767; 2 Kings 14:13-14; 2 Chron. 25:23-24)
4. During Ahaz's reign (732-715 B.C.; 2 Chron. 28:16-18)
5. During Jehoiakim's reign (609-598 B.C.; 2 Kings 24:1-4; 2 Chron. 36:6-7)
6. During Jehoiachin's reign (598-597 B.C.; 2 Kings 24:10-16; 2 Chron. 36:10)
7. During Zedekiah's reign (597-586 B.C.; 2 Kings 25:3-7; 2 Chron. 36:15-20; cf. Lam. 4:21-22; Ps. 137:7)

²See Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, p. 828-32.

³For further discussion of the book's unity, see especially John D. W. Watts, *Obadiah: A Critical Exegetical Commentary*, pp. 9-10; Leslie C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, pp. 133-355; and Tremper Longman III and Raymond B. Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp. 439-40.

⁴Gleason L. Archer Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, p. 299.

A few scholars have proposed that Obadiah's entire oracle awaits an earthly and eschatological fulfillment.⁵ This view is not widely held.

Of these past invasions and defeats, the ones that seem to fit Obadiah's description of the Edomites' behavior were: the one in King Jehoram's reign, and the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians in 586 B.C.⁶ Most scholars believe that one of these instances is in view, and most believe the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. is.⁷ The second most popular view is that the invasion of Jerusalem during Jehoram's reign is what Obadiah referred to.⁸ This would make Obadiah a contemporary of Elijah and Elisha (cf. 2 Chron. 21:12-15).

The second clue to the date of Obadiah's prophecy is the place of the book in the Hebrew canon. The Minor Prophets are called "minor," of course, because they are shorter than the Major Prophets.⁹ The Jews put all 12 of the Minor Prophets on one scroll, for convenience sake and to keep them from getting lost. The order in which they appear in the Hebrew Bible is basically chronological, and this order continued in later translations of the Old Testament, including English translations. This would lead us to conclude that the ancient Jews regarded Obadiah as one of the earlier prophetic books.

The order is not completely chronological. Hosea seems to have been put first because it is the longest of the pre-exilic Minor Prophets. The recurrence of similar themes and words, also appears to have influenced the order, since Joel, rather than Amos, the second longest pre-exilic minor prophet, follows Hosea. Allen suggested that Obadiah may follow Amos because it "may have been viewed as a virtual commentary on Amos 9:12."¹⁰ Stuart suggested that Obadiah follows Amos because Obadiah used the name Adonai Yahweh (v. 1), a rare name for God in the prophets, that Amos also used.¹¹

⁵E.g., Mark A. Hassler, "The Setting of Obadiah: When Does the Oracle Concerning Edom Transpire?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 59:2 (2016):241-54.

⁶For arguments that Jerusalem fell in 587 B.C., see Rodger C. Young, "When Did Jerusalem Fall?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47:1 (March 2004):21-38.

⁷E.g., George Adam Smith, *The Book of the Twelve Prophets Commonly Called the Minor*, 2:172; Watts, pp. 8-9, 19, 27, 54; Allen, pp. 129-33; Douglas Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, pp. 403-4, 416; Thomas J. Finley, *Joel, Amos, Obadiah*, p. 340-42; Billy K. Smith, "Obadiah," in *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, p. 172; David W. Baker, *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah: An Introduction and Commentary*, p. 23; Carl E. Armerding, "Obadiah," in *Daniel-Minor Prophets*, vol. 7 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 337; Frank E. Gaebelien, *Four Minor Prophets [Obadiah, Jonah, Habakkuk, and Haggai]: Their Message for Today*, pp. 13, 28; G. Herbert Livingston, "Obadiah," in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 839; Roland K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp. 898, 902; John Bright, *A History of Israel*, pp. 356, 417; Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "A Theology of the Minor Prophets," in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 418; idem, *Handbook on the Prophets*, p. 403; *The New Scofield Reference Bible*, p. 939; and Waltke, p. 845.

⁸E.g., Keil, 1:341-49; Walter L. Baker, "Obadiah," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, p. 1454; Hobart E. Freeman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets*, p. 136; Archer, pp. 299-303; Leon J. Wood, *The Prophets of Israel*, pp. 262-64; Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Israel: A History of Old Testament Israel*, p. 382; Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology*, p. 186; Edward J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 277; Charles H. Dyer, in *The Old Testament Explorer*, pp. 765-66; and Warren W. Wiersbe, "Obadiah," in *The Bible Exposition Commentary/Prophets*, p. 371. See especially Jeffrey Niehaus, "Obadiah," in *The Minor Prophets*, pp. 496-502.

⁹See John N. Oswalt, "Is There Anything Unique in the Israelite Prophets?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 172:685 (January-March 2015):67-84.

¹⁰Allen, p. 129. Cf. B. K. Smith, p. 180.

¹¹Stuart, p. 416.

"In the arrangement of The Twelve in the Hebrew Bible the chronological principle which seems to have determined the over-all order was as follows: (1) the prophets of the Assyrian period were placed first (Hosea to Nahum); (2) then followed those of the Babylonian period (Habakkuk and Zephaniah); (3) the series closed with the three prophets of the Persian period after the exile (Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi)."¹²

The third clue concerning the date of Obadiah is evidence that one prophet depended on another. There are similarities between Obadiah 1-6 and Jeremiah 49:9 and 14-17, and between Obadiah 10-18 and Joel 1:15; 2:1, 32; 3:3-4, 17, and 19.¹³ There are also similarities between Obadiah 9, 10, 14, 18, and 19 and Amos 1:2, 6, 11-12, and 9:13.¹⁴ However, in all these instances it is really impossible to determine if Obadiah referred to the other prophets, if they referred to Obadiah, if they all depended on another common source, or if the Holy Spirit simply led each prophet independently to express himself in similar terms.

Unfortunately, none of these sources of information enables us to date the book with certainty. All things considered, I tend to favor an early date for Obadiah, about 850 B.C. However, those who prefer a date shortly after 586 B.C. could be correct. Fortunately, discovering the correct date of this prophecy is not crucial to understanding it.

PLACE OF COMPOSITION AND AUDIENCE

Since Obadiah's concern was the Edomites' rejoicing over an invasion of Jerusalem, it seems most probable that the prophet lived in the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Most of the scholars do agree on this.

Since Obadiah's concern was Jerusalem, and since it seems likely that he lived in Judah, the original people who received his prophecy were probably the residents of Judah.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Edomites were the descendants of Esau, who displaced the Horites (a.k.a. Hurrians) that we read about in the Book of Genesis. The Horites and the Amorites were the original inhabitants of Palestine.

During the Monarchy, David captured Edom, stationed a garrison there, and made Edom a vassal state (1 Chron. 18:12-13). Solomon later developed the port city of Ezion-geber (Elath; 1 Kings 9:26-28). Hadad, a member of the Edomite royal family, opposed Solomon and set up a government in exile in Egypt (1 Kings 11:14-17). But Judah still governed Edom during the reign of King Jehoshaphat, who posted a governor in Edom (1 Kings 22:47-48). Edom gained her freedom from Judah, in 845 B.C., by rebelling against Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat (2 Kings 8:20-22; 2 Chron. 21:8-10, 16-17).

¹²Freeman, p. 135. See also Greg Goswell, "The Order of the Books in the Hebrew Bible," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 51:4 (December 2008):673-88.

¹³For defense of the priority of Obadiah to Jeremiah, see Niehaus, p. 501. For defense of the priority of Jeremiah to Obadiah, see E. B. Pusey, *The Minor Prophets*, 1:345-50.

¹⁴See *ibid.*, 1:348-49.

King Amaziah of Judah partially recaptured Edom between 790 and 770 B.C. (2 Kings 14:7). King Uzziah of Judah recaptured the port of Ezion-geber (2 Kings 14:21-22).

Aram (Syria) later took back Ezion-geber from Judah (2 Kings 16:5-6). After that the Edomites revolted and attacked Judah a second time, during the reign of King Ahaz of Judah (2 Chron. 28:17). Finally, when King Nebuchadnezzar attacked Judah, the Edomites assisted the Babylonians (Ps. 137:7; Jer. 49:7-22; Ezek. 25:12-14; 35:1-15).

After the Babylonian invasion of Judah—and of their former ally against Judah, Edom—the Nabatean Arabs took over the capital city of Sela (Gr. Petra) and forced the remaining Edomites into southern Judah, where they settled. The Greeks named this area "Idumea," and its inhabitants Idumeans, following Alexander the Great's conquest of Palestine in the 4th century B.C.

After the Romans replaced the Greeks as the dominant power in Palestine, they permitted the Idumeans to enjoy some sovereignty. King Herod the Great, who was in charge of Palestine when Jesus was born, was an Idumean. The Idumeans later joined the Jews in revolting against the Romans in 68-70 A.D. Their defeat resulted in their scattering, and they ceased to exist as a people. This was the fulfillment of Obadiah's prophecy of judgment on their nation. Edom's history of antagonism against Israel was long and consistent.

PURPOSE AND UNIQUENESS

Obadiah wrote to announce coming divine judgment on Edom, and to give the Israelites hope by reminding them of the future that God promised them.

"Prophetic oracles against foreign nations, though full of the language of doom, are also implicitly messages of hope for God's people. Such oracles look forward to a time when the predicted demise of the nation under attack will open the way for the restored, purified Israel to blossom once again as the flower of all God's plantings.

"Obadiah's message fits this pattern and in some ways even typifies it."¹⁵

"What would be a single oracle against a foreign nation in one of the other prophetic books has in Obadiah become an independent book."¹⁶

Most authorities see Edom as typical of all the forces arrayed against Israel and Yahweh.¹⁷ Some scholars also see Edom as a type of *the flesh*, and Obadiah as a prophecy of its eventual destruction.¹⁸

"In a sense Obadiah is a miniature profile of the message of all the writing prophets."¹⁹

¹⁵Stuart, p. 408. See also Kaiser, p. 187; and Finley, p. 351.

¹⁶Longman and Dillard, p. 438.

¹⁷E.g., Archer, p. 302. Cf. v. 15.

¹⁸E.g., Charles Lee Feinberg, *Joel, Amos, and Obadiah*, p. 124.

¹⁹W. Baker, p. 1453.

"Edom . . . was tenaciously and rather constantly hostile from beginning, i.e., after the exodus, to end, i.e., after the exile. This factor would itself be enough to cause such a small nation to receive such regular, even prominent mention in prophetic oracles against foreign nations. But Edom's prominence as an enemy was additionally noteworthy because of its historical position as a brother nation to Israel (Gen 25). There are, then, at least three factors that made Edom so prominent among Israel's enemies that it could sometimes function virtually as a paradigm for all of them: (1) the sheer chronological length of its enmity as alluded to in Ezek 35:5; (2) the consistency and intensity of its enmity (as in Obad 10-14); (3) the 'treasonous' nature of its enmity (as in Amos 1:11). No other nation quite shared these characteristics.

". . . of the ancient non-superpowers (i.e., leaving aside Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon) Edom is the subject of more separate oracles against foreign nations (seven [i.e., Isa. 21:11-12; Jer. 49:7-22; Ezek. 25:12-14; 35; Amos 1:11-12; Obad.; Mal. 1:2-5]) and more brief or passing hostile references (four [i.e., Isa. 11:14; Jer. 25:21; Lam. 4:21; Joel 3:19]) in the prophetic books than any other nation."²⁰

There are more references to Edom in the Bible than to any other hostile nation except the superpowers.

"The Edomites played such a consistently adversarial role in Israel's history that the prophetic literary category of 'oracles against foreign nations' was bound to include predictions of judgments against Edom. Edom, indeed, becomes in the OT a kind of metonymy for 'hostile nations.'"²¹

Metonymy is a figure of speech in which the writer uses the name of one thing (Edom) for another that is associated with or suggested by it (all Israel's enemies).

Edom is the subject of the little Book of Obadiah as Assyria is of the larger Book of Nahum. Assyria is also the subject of the Book of Jonah, but Jonah focuses on the capital city, Nineveh, more than on the whole nation of Assyria.

The New Testament writers did not quote from or allude to the Book of Obadiah.

As with all the other prophetic books, references to God's covenants form an important background. People who lived in the ancient Near East were aware of the covenants that nations made with one another, the blessings of covenant faithfulness, and the curses that would come because of covenant unfaithfulness. This view of life is very prominent in all the prophetic books.

²⁰Stuart, p. 404. This writer provided a helpful table of all the nations that the writing prophets referred to and the locations of their prophecies against these nations on pp. 405-6. For a synopsis of the relations between Edom and Israel, see Finley, pp. 345-48. Most commentaries and Bible encyclopedias contain a summary of Edom's history.

²¹Stuart, p. 421. Cf. Judg. 5:4; Isa. 63:1-6.

OUTLINE

- I. Edom's coming judgment vv. 1-9
 - A. The introduction to the oracle v. 1
 - B. The breaching of Edom's defenses vv. 2-4
 - C. The plundering of Edom's treasures vv. 5-7
 - D. The destruction of Edom's leadership vv. 8-9
- II. Edom's crimes against Judah vv. 10-14
 - A. The statement of the charge v. 10
 - B. The explanation of the charge vv. 11-14
- III. The restoration of Israel's sovereignty vv. 15-21
 - A. The judgment of Edom and the nations vv. 15-18
 - B. The occupation of Edom by Israel vv. 19-21

Many competent commentators believed that the Book of Obadiah follows the covenant-lawsuit form of address that was common in the ancient Near East.²² In this type of message, which many of the other writing prophets also used, there are certain formulaic sections. These are, most basically, a description of the scene of judgment and then the speech by the judge. This speech typically includes an address to the defendant (including reproach based on an accusation and a statement that the accused has no defense), the pronouncement of guilt, and the sentence. Niehaus outlined Obadiah on this basis as follows.²³

- I. Title (1a)
- II. Description of the scene of judgment (nations arise for battle, 1b)
- III. Speech by the Judge (2-21)
 - A. Three sentences (2-9)
 - 1. First sentence (2-4)
 - 2. Second sentence (5-7)
 - 3. Third sentence (8-9)
 - B. Three pronouncements of guilt (10-14)
 - 1. First pronouncement (10)
 - 2. Second pronouncement (11)
 - 3. Third pronouncement (12-14)
 - C. Sentence on the nations (15-16)
 - D. Promise of restoration (17-21)

²²See, for example, Herbert B. Huffmon, "The Covenant Lawsuit in the Prophets," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 78 (1959):285-95.

²³Niehaus, p. 507.

MESSAGE

The very fact that this book consists of only one chapter should alert us to its importance. If it were unimportant, God would not have preserved it, and it would have disappeared long ago. Its shortness also simplifies our task of discovering its message. Like all the Bible books, this one has a message that is vital for us today, as well as for its original readers centuries ago.

Obadiah reveals the culmination of sibling rivalry and the national antagonism that developed between the descendants of Jacob and Esau: the Israelites and the Edomites. The conflict between these two boys and their respective descendants began before they were born. The infants struggled in the womb of their mother Rebekah (Gen. 25:22).

In describing this conflict, God said that He "loved" Jacob, but He "hated" Esau (Mal. 1:2-3). The terms "love" and "hate" reflect God's elective purpose for both sons. When God said He loved Jacob but hated Esau, He meant that He chose to bless Jacob in a way that He did not choose to bless Esau. The statement expresses polar opposites to make the difference clearer. Often when God wanted to say He chose to bless someone, in the Old Testament, He said He *loved* that person. This was covenant terminology in the ancient Near East, and people in that part of the world at that time understood that loving and hating had these connotations.

The line of Jacob finally produced Jesus Christ. The line of Esau produced the Herods. Both Jesus and the Herods were "kings of the Jews." Jesus never spoke to Herod Antipas, even when questioned by him, though He did send him a message once (Luke 13:32), illustrating the antagonism that existed between them. This antagonism consistently marked the relationship between the Edomites and the Israelites.

Esau is in the foreground of the Book of Obadiah, and Jacob is in the background. Jacob and his descendants passed through suffering and chastisement, and their ultimate destiny is restoration and usefulness. Esau and his descendants were proud, rebellious, defiant, and their end was ultimate destruction. Jacob was the more unattractive personality originally, and Esau was more appealing.

Yet God overruled what was natural, in order to produce what He wanted in the lives of both of these men, in view of their choices. Divine sovereignty and human choices are so intertwined that it is impossible for us to separate them. The Scriptures consistently present both as real and significant factors in the course of human affairs.

Obadiah tells the story of the destruction of Edom, the nation that descended from Esau. It also shows that God will destroy all that Edom stood for and represented. "Edom" is "Esau projected into national proportions." In Obadiah, we see the essential evil of Esau, the supreme manifestation of that evil, and the inevitable result of that evil. But we also see a ray of hope even for "the mount of Esau," Mt. Seir, the most notable geographical feature in Edom, that often represents the nation of Edom in the Old Testament (by metonymy).

The essential evil of Esau and Edom was pride. This comes through in verse 3: "The arrogance of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rock, in the loftiness of your dwelling place, who say in your heart, who will bring me down to

earth?" The Edomites lived in a rocky, reclusive region around a town that later became known as Petra: ancient Sela. The Nabateans, the Arabians who later drove the Edomites out, actually carved Petra out of solid rock.

The habitation of the Edomites, who occupied this region before the Nabateans took it over, says much about them. They were self-reliant isolationists and fiercely independent.

"This self-sufficiency was aggravated by the position of the country among several of the main routes of ancient trade."²⁴

In some ways, the Edomites were like the "survivalists" of our own day. They preferred to be by themselves. They distrusted others. They wanted to control their own destiny. They took refuge in a part of the wilderness from which they thought they could defend themselves against all enemies. And they were very proud.

Pride is one of those sins that is most difficult to deal with. It is much easier to deal with lying, stealing, adultery and other blatant sins. Pride, on the other hand, is something that we can practice without too many people discovering it, if we are clever enough. In fact, we may be proud and not even know it ourselves. Pride is a root from which many more overt sins grow. *Pride* is an attitude that says: "I (or We) can get along without God." The Edomites had their idols, and they did not bow to the true and living God. The Edomites thought they were invincible.

Esau had no use for the promises of God, and his descendants, too, thought they could get along quite well without God. The New Testament calls Esau a "profane person" (Heb. 12:16), literally a person "against the temple." A profane person cares nothing for spiritual things, because he or she glories in his or her own animal abilities, and lives to satisfy those appetites. An extremely proud person acts as though he or she were independent of God: never prays, never worships, never thinks of heaven. Christians can live like this, too, of course.

The Edomites built their nests high, like the eagles—so high they appeared to be among the stars (v. 4). The eagle is often a picture of deity in the Bible. In the Edomites' case, they had deified themselves and made themselves their god. They thought they could protect themselves from danger and enemies by building their homes high in the cliffs of the Edom wilderness. But God said that He would bring them down (v. 4).

If pride was Edom's essential sin, violence was the supreme manifestation of that sin. The Edomites not only protected themselves, but they did wrong to others, and rejoiced when they harmed others. Verses 10 and 11 say, "Because of violence to your brother Jacob you will be covered with shame and cut off forever. On the day that you stood aloof, on the day that strangers carried off his wealth, and foreigners entered his gate and cast lots for Jerusalem, you too were as one of them." When the Edomites saw their brother Israelites suffering, they not only complacently did nothing, but they even rejoiced and added to those sufferings.

²⁴G. A. Smith, 2:180.

The Israelites represented faith in Yahweh. They stood for this ideal, though admittedly they failed to be consistent in their witness. Nevertheless, they continued to believe in God and to follow Him. The Edomites' unnatural violence against the Israelites revealed their hatred for what the Israelites stood for, not just the Israelites themselves. So when the Israelites suffered, the Edomites rejoiced. Even though they were the Israelites' brothers according to the flesh, they consistently opposed them for what the Israelites stood for. For example, the Edomites refused to allow the Israelites to pass through their territory on the way to the Promised Land.

The result of such godless pride, which leads to violence against the people of God, is divine retribution. The Edomites thought they were secure (v. 4), but God said that He would bring them down (v. 4). "Will I not on that day, declares the LORD, destroy wise men from Edom and understanding from the mountain of Esau? Then your mighty men will be dismayed, O Teman, in order that every one may be cut off from the mountain of Esau by slaughter" (vv. 8-9). The God, whom the Edomites thought they could disregard, would visit and destroy them. God is higher than even the eagles. He is the One who formed the mountains in which the Edomites foolishly trusted for safety.

God would bring down the Edomites by overruling the plans the Edomites made. "All the men allied with you will send you forth to the border, and the men at peace with you will deceive you and overpower you. They who eat your bread [as covenant partners] will set an ambush for you" (v. 7). The Edomites also trusted in other nations for their security rather than in God. But the Lord would use the very objects of Edom's trust to destroy her. He often uses the false gods that people rely on, instead of Himself, to do this. Allies in ungodliness turn out to be enemies eventually. For example, criminals sometimes become witnesses for the prosecution of other criminals to shorten their own sentences.

As usual, God would deal with Edom in poetic justice, or talionic judgment. What they had sowed they would reap (cf. Gal. 6:7-8). Esau had sowed to the flesh, and in the end the flesh became the instrument of the Edomites' destruction. God said, "As you have done, it will be done to you" (v. 15).

But this prophecy does not end with promises of Edom's destruction. It ends with promises of Israel's final victory, and the vindication of Israel's God. Obadiah predicted that, first of all, despised Israel would be delivered from her proud enemy. "The house of Jacob will possess their possessions" (v. 18). "Deliverers will ascend Mount Zion to judge the mountain of Esau" (v. 21). Then "the kingdom will be the Lord's" (v. 21).

The conflict between the people of the world and people of faith still continues, but the kingdom will eventually become the Lord's. This will happen when Jesus Christ returns to the earth and sets up His rule of righteousness. He will then put down all the proud, violent antagonists of His people, and all that they stand for.

The Edomites were the most "fleshly" enemies of Israel, to use a New Testament term. Therefore, this book shows us the ultimate destiny of all such enemies of God's people throughout history, as well as the Edomites. It is for that reason that we have this little book in our Old Testaments. The church has its Edomites. The Christian has his or her

Edomites. This book gives us hope. God will eventually destroy all Edomite types, just as He has already destroyed the historic Edomites in fulfillment of Obadiah's prophecy.

This book also challenges Christian readers to examine their own hearts: What sort of person am I? Am I like Esau, or am I like Jacob? Jacob was far from perfect, but God transformed him into Israel: "a prince with God" eventually. The difference between these brothers, and the nations that followed them, was that Jacob valued God's promises concerning the future, but Esau preferred a pot of stew that made him feel good right away.

Jacob valued the *spiritual*; Esau valued the *physical*. What does the way *you* live *your* life, the way *you* spend *your* time, the places *you* go, and the people *you* like to "hang out" with say about *what you value*? Are you living with eternity's values consciously in view, or are you simply living for the present?

God will take Jacobs to the woodshed, as He did with Jacob at the Jabbok, and as He did with Jacob's descendants throughout their history. But He will discipline us because He has a future for us, and intends to prepare us for it. He does not bother to train up the Esaus of this world. He may allow them to become materially successful, to build secure nests, to soar like eagles, to be their own gods, to snub their noses at and even violently persecute believers, but He will eventually destroy them.

A few Edomites abandoned the typical Edomite lifestyle, believed in Yahweh, and moved to Israel to become a part of the people of God. A few people from all of Israel's pagan neighbors did this. Ruth the Moabitess is an outstanding example. So there is hope for any individual. Judgment is not inevitable for individuals, as long as there is time to repent. Nevertheless, what the Edomites stood for as a nation fell under divine judgment, and they perished.

Many students of Obadiah have noted that this book is a summary of the essential message of all the prophetic books of the Old Testament. It deals with a major issue that lies behind all the prophetic writings, namely: pride. Pride is probably the biggest problem that every Christian has to deal with. We must remember how God views pride, and this book reminds us.²⁵

²⁵Adapted from G. Campbell Morgan, *Living Messages of the Books of the Bible*, 1:2:213-25.

Exposition

I. EDOM'S COMING JUDGMENT VV. 1-9

This section of the prophecy begins with an introductory statement and then describes Edom's destruction three ways.

A. THE INTRODUCTION TO THE ORACLE V. 1

This verse contains the title of the book, the shortest title of any Old Testament prophetic book, as well as a summary of the Lord's decree against Edom. This revelation came as a vision (Heb. *hazon*; cf. 1 Sam. 3:1; Isa. 1:1; Nah. 1:1) to the prophet.

"The vision is to be sharply differentiated from common sight and things seen. It is the result of inspiration and is understood as having unique significance since it is given by God himself."²⁶

The vision came to the prophet Obadiah ("servant of Yahweh" or "worshipper of Yahweh"). As mentioned in the introduction to this exposition, nothing is known about Obadiah other than his name. We must infer where and when he lived and ministered from various clues.

"Thus says the Lord GOD" is a common phrase in the Prophets. It is a strong claim that the corresponding oracle did not originate in the prophet's own imagination, but in the mind of God (cf. 2 Pet. 1:20-21). "Adonai (i.e., sovereign) Yahweh" (cf. Gen. 2:4; et al.) had made a pronouncement concerning the nation of Edom. This is an unusual titular (combination title and name) for the Lord. It identifies the covenant God of Israel as sovereign of the world and history.

"Yahweh was truly Lord. This entire prophecy gives one specific example of the exercise of his lordship."²⁷

"Edom" was the nation that had grown out of the descendants of Esau, the twin brother of Jacob (cf. Gen. 36:1). The Edomites occupied the territory east of the Arabah between the Dead Sea and the Gulf of Aqabah south of the Zered River and north of Ezion-geber (Elath). Its eastern boundary was the Arabian Desert. Edom was also known as Seir after Mount Seir, the prominent tableland that occupied the northeastern part of Edom's territory.²⁸

Those who had heard a report (message) from the Lord were God's people. Obadiah spoke to them and used an editorial "we." God was sovereignly and supernaturally summoning other nations against Edom, probably through "natural" means (i.e., the desire to defeat her and take over her territory). The "envoy . . . sent among the nations"

²⁶Watts, p. 42.

²⁷Ibid., p. 47.

²⁸For maps of Edom, see Barry J. Beitzel, *The Moody Atlas of the Bible*; the Hammond *Atlas of the Bible Lands*; and Yohanan Aharoni and Michael Avi-Yonah, *The Macmillan Bible Atlas*, revised edition.

is probably a personification of the desire God had placed in these nations to destroy Edom. That desire, from the spiritual viewpoint, was His messenger.

B. THE BREACHING OF EDMON'S DEFENSES VV. 2-4

Verses 2-9 contain three sections, which the phrase "declares the Lord" marks off (vv. 4, 8).

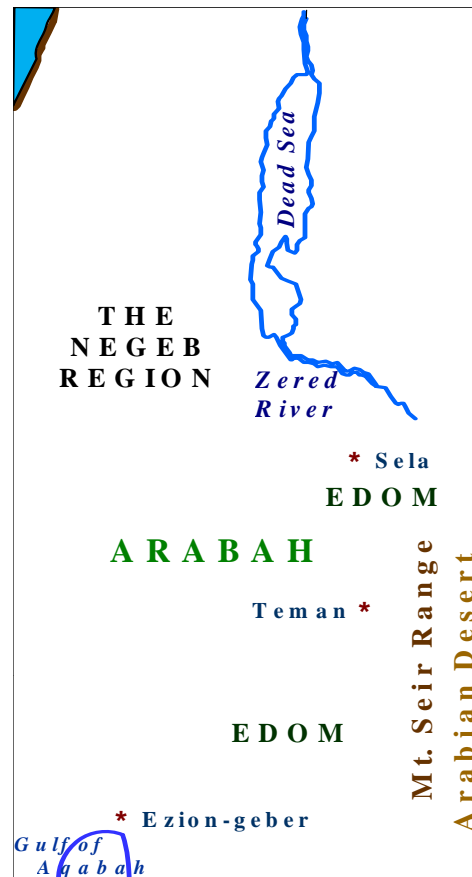
v. 2 Yahweh called Obadiah's hearers to see that He would make Edom, which was already despised because of her character, "small among the nations." He would humble her further.

v. 3 The outstanding mark of Edom's national character was pride. The Hebrew word for pride (*zadon*) comes from a verb meaning to boil up (*zid*). It pictures pride as water that boils up under pressure in a cooking pot. Similarly the proud person is like a bubble that thrusts itself up but is hollow. Interestingly, the same Hebrew word occurs three times in the account of Esau, the father of the Edomites, squandering his birthright (Gen. 25:27-34).

". . . the key that unlocks the central moral lesson of the book is found in these words in the third verse: 'The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee.'²⁹

"What is pride? Let me give you a definition of it: Pride of heart is the attitude of a life that declares its ability to live without God."³⁰

"It is possible for Christians also to fall into the sin of pride. One has only to dismiss God from the reckoning, one has but to slip into the habit of neglecting his Bible, one has merely to fail to be alone with God daily in prayer, and he too may fall into the sin of making decisions and living his



²⁹Gaebelein, p. 48.

³⁰J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, 3:729.

life on a secular basis without placing God and His will foremost."³¹

The Edomites thought they were superior because they inhabited a lofty region: Mt. Seir. They thought they were secure because they occupied this militarily favorable location. In fact, they thought they were invincible.

"Edom's natural defenses were imposing. Its main centers of civilization were situated in a narrow ridge of mountainous land southeast of the Dead Sea . . . This ridge exceeded a height of 4,000 feet throughout its northern sector, and it rose in places to 5,700 feet in the south. Its height was rendered more inaccessible by the gorges radiating from it toward the Arabah on the west and the desert eastwards.

"In addition to these natural fortifications, Edom was strongly defended by a series of Iron Age fortresses, particularly on the eastern frontier where the land descended more gradually to the desert."³²

The "rock" (Heb. *sela'*) in view is the granite and sandstone that made up Mt. Seir. Though Sela was also the name of an Edomite town (cf. 2 Kings 14:7), here the mountain home of the whole nation seems to be in view. The Greek translation of *sela'* is Petra, the modern name of this town.

v. 4 Here the figure of an "eagle," that was also in view in the previous verse, becomes explicit. Even if the Edomites would build their "nest" as high as the "stars" (hyperbole), God would "bring" them "down." Hyperbole is overstatement for the sake of emphasis. King Sennacherib of Assyria and King Assurnassirpal II of Assyria both used the same figure to boast of their security in their respective annals.³³

The Edomites might have been *humanly* unassailable, but they were not *divinely* unassailable. They had proudly boasted, "Who will bring me down to the earth?" (v. 3), but Yahweh replied, "I will bring you down" (v. 4). He would burst their bubble. He Himself declared that He would.

Malachi, who wrote some 400 years later, mentioned that the Edomites were still in existence then (Mal. 1:3-4). By 312 B.C. the capital of Edom

³¹Gaebelein, p. 52. This writer's discussion of the sin of pride in the light of today (pp. 48-52) is worth reading.

³²Armerding, pp. 342-43.

³³See Daniel D. Luckenbill, *The Annals of Sennacherib*, p. 36; and Albert K. Grayson, *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions*, 2:122.

was in Nabatean hands, and Edom had ceased to exist as a nation, though Edomites continued to live. They became known as Idumeans. Herod the Great was an Idumean.

C. THE PLUNDERING OF EDOM'S TREASURES VV. 5-7

- vv. 5-6 Thieves robbed houses and grape harvesters stripped vineyards, yet both left a little behind that they did not carry off. However, Yahweh's destruction of Edom would be so complete that nothing at all would remain of her (cf. Jer. 49:9-10). There would be no remnant of Edom left (in contrast to the remnant that Yahweh promised elsewhere to leave in Israel). The form of this assurance sounds like mourning in the presence of death. Concealed "treasures" of all kinds, human as well as material, would not escape Yahweh's omniscient eye (cf. v. 4).
- v. 7 Edom's allies would treacherously betray their friend. Thus, Edom would not only deceive herself, but her trusted allies would also "deceive" her. They would do what in the ancient Near East was most despicable, namely: break a covenant with a covenant partner (cf. Ps. 55:20; Amos 1:9). Edom's allies would prove to be the worst of enemies. They would fail to assist her in her hour of greatest need. Three parallel descriptions of covenant disloyalty in this verse picture the treachery as certain. Moreover, this disloyalty would completely surprise ("ambush") the Edomites.

"Edom was a weak country militarily, its small population and its limited agricultural wealth precluding powerful armed forces. Therefore its ability to attack Judah's Negeb and help plunder Jerusalem had depended on its obsequious alliance with more powerful states, especially Babylon."³⁴

This writer believed Obadiah wrote after the Babylonians defeated Jerusalem.

D. THE DESTRUCTION OF EDOM'S LEADERSHIP VV. 8-9

"Obadiah's discussion nicely interweaves the themes of divine intervention and human instrumentality."³⁵

- v. 8 The repetition of "declares the Lord" (cf. v. 4) reemphasizes Yahweh's initiative in this judgment. "That day" points to a specific, though undefined, day when He would surely destroy Edom.

³⁴Stuart, pp. 417-18.

³⁵Finley, p. 362.

God would destroy Edom's famous "wise men" (cf. 1 Kings 4:30; Job 1:1; 2:11; 4:1; Jer. 49:7; Lam. 4:21; Baruch 3:23), and their "understanding," by allowing them to fail to detect the unfaithfulness of their allies (v. 7). They would also overestimate their own security (v. 3).

"Because of its communication with Babylon and Egypt and because of the information gleaned through the caravans going to and from Europe and India, Edom had gained an enviable reputation for wisdom."³⁶

The "mountain of Esau" (cf. v. 9) is Mt. Seir, the mountain God gave Esau and his descendants to inhabit (Deut. 2:5).

v. 9 The "mighty men" of Edom may be a synonym for the wise men (v. 8) or the nation's warriors. Together with the wise men, the mighty men form a merism, a figure of speech in which two parts stand for the whole, in this case all the Edomites. Rather than feeling confident, the mighty men, a chief resource of the nation, would feel dismayed when they realized that their covenant partners had proved traitorous.

"Teman" was both a prominent town in central Edom (possibly modern Tuwilan),³⁷ and the region around the town (cf. Gen. 36:10-11). But its name stands for the whole nation (by metonymy). The end of all this deception and destruction would be the total termination of Edom.

II. EDOM'S CRIMES AGAINST JUDAH VV. 10-14

Verse 10 summarizes what verses 11-14 detail in the same way verse 1 did in relation to verses 2-9.

A. THE STATEMENT OF THE CHARGE V. 10

Pride was not the only reason God would humble Edom. The Edomites had also *cursed* the people whom God had purposed to bless, the Israelites (cf. Gen. 27:40-41; Exod. 15:15; Num. 20:14-21; Deut. 2:4; Judg. 11:17-18; 1 Sam. 14:47-48; 2 Sam. 8:13-14; 1 Kings 11:15-16; 1 Chron. 18:11-13; Ps. 60; et al.). In doing this, they had incurred God's wrath (Gen. 12:3).³⁸ "Violence" (Heb. *hamas*) includes both moral wrong and physical brutality. This violence was especially despicable since it was against Edom's "brother, Jacob" (i.e., the Israelites). Consequently, great "shame" would cover Edom (cf. v. 2), and God would "cut" her "off forever" (cf. v. 9).

³⁶Feinberg, p. 126.

³⁷Yohanan Aharoni and Michael Avi-Yonah, *The Macmillan Bible Atlas*, map 155; *Student Map Manual: Historical Geography of the Bible Lands*, map 9-2.

³⁸See Stephen J. Bramer, "Suffering in the Writing Prophets (Isaiah to Malachi)," in *Why, O God? Suffering and Disability in the Bible and the Church*, p. 156.

B. THE EXPLANATION OF THE CHARGE vv. 11-14

- v. 11 God cited one specific instance of Edom's violence against her brother, but as I explained in the introduction, which instance is unclear. Edom's treachery against Judah had taken place on a particular "day" in the past. Likewise, God's judgment would come on a particular "day" yet future (v. 8). "Day" does not always refer to a period of 12 or 24 hours in the Bible. It sometimes refers to a longer period of time but one that is distinguishable as a period of time (e.g., Gen. 2:4).

The Edomites' sin was that they failed to help the Israelites in their hour of need (cf. Luke 10:31-32). Instead, they "stood aloof" and watched joyfully as Israel's invader plundered Jerusalem. Enemies passing through a city's gate signified the loss of its self-rule.³⁹ God considered the Edomites as guilty as Jerusalem's invaders—because the Edomites failed to help their brethren.

"In the sight of God, who looks not on the outward appearance but on the heart, there is little distinction in moral accountability between overt sin and an inner bias toward that sin that permits it to go unchecked (cf. Matt 5:21-32)."⁴⁰

". . . the Israelites are always commanded in the law to preserve a friendly and brotherly attitude towards Edom (Deut. ii. 4, 5); and in Deut. xxiii. 7 it is enjoined upon them not to abhor the Edomite, because he is their brother."⁴¹

- vv. 12-13 God reinforced the seriousness of the Edomites' sin by condemning it in parallel terminology eight times (vv. 12-14). Compare the same parallel structure in verse 7 where there is a threefold positive reiteration. There is also a pun in the Hebrew text since the word for "disaster" (*'edam*) is similar to the word "Edom" (*'edom*).

Hostile attitudes ("gloat," "rejoice," "boast"), more than physical violence ("loot"), were Edom's greater sins against the Israelites on this occasion. Blood ties should have transcended even covenant ties. Edom's allies would break covenant ties with her (v. 7), but she had betrayed blood ties.

- v. 14 Physical violence eventually came into play too. As the Judean fugitives from Jerusalem left the city, the Edomites met them at some fork in the road, and murdered them, rather than helping them escape from the

³⁹Niehaus, p. 529.

⁴⁰Armerding, p. 348.

⁴¹Keil, 1:360.

invader. Other Edomites imprisoned fleeing Judahites instead of giving them refuge. This could be poetic hyperbole, but there is nothing in the text that indicates overstatement. All the other descriptions of Edom's actions seem to be literal.

Some English translations render verses 12-14 as referring to the future, while others have interpreted them as referring to the past. Most commentators take the time as past; God was describing something that had already happened.⁴² A few take it as future, describing something that would take place in the future.⁴³ Since this is a judgment oracle, it seems more likely that God was announcing judgment on Edom for something she had already done rather than for something she would do in the future. As she had been proud (v. 2), she had also been violent (v. 10).

Keil proposed that Obadiah referred to an event that had happened *and* to another that would happen again in the future—the past event being typical of future reoccurrences.⁴⁴

The two most likely historical occasions that are in view are: first, the invasion by a coalition of Arabs and Philistines who carried off King Jehoram's family and his property during a period of tension with Edom (2 Kings 8:20-22; 2 Chron. 20:1-2; 21:8-17; 22:1). The second possible event was the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. (2 Kings 24:13-16; 25:4-17; 2 Chron. 36:18, 20; cf. Ps. 137:7; Jer. 9:26; 25:21; 27:3; 40:11; Ezek. 25:12; 32:29; 35:3-9, 11-15; 36:2-7; Lam. 1:17; 2:15-17; 4:21-22). As discussed in the introduction to this exposition, I think there is slightly better evidence for the first occasion than for the second.

III. THE RESTORATION OF ISRAEL'S SOVEREIGNTY VV. 15-21

As is true of many of the prophetic books, this one also ends with a promise of Israel's restoration in the future.

A. THE JUDGMENT OF EDOM AND THE NATIONS VV. 15-18

References to the work and word of the Lord frame this section. Obadiah announced that a reversal of roles was coming for Edom and all the nations.

v. 15 "The day of the Lord" here is a future day in which God will reverse the fortunes of Israel and the nations (cf. v. 8). "The day of the Lord," a common term in the Prophets, refers generally to any time when God intervenes in human affairs to accomplish His will. The day that Obadiah

⁴²E.g., Finley, p. 340.

⁴³E.g., Gaebelien, pp. 5, 29.

⁴⁴Keil, 1:363.

announced will be the day when God establishes His rule in human affairs, namely, when Jesus Christ returns to rule and reign on the earth. Obadiah said *that day* was approaching. As Edom and the other nations had done to Israel, so God would pay them back with precisely the same judgment (*lex talionis*; cf. Lev. 24:20; Deut. 19:21; Gal. 6:7).

"God shows not only his sovereignty over all people by not permitting unrequited wickedness, but also his justice by not permitting punishment to exceed crime."⁴⁵

Edom's punishments that resulted in her demise as a nation—before the Second Coming—were part of God's judgment on her, but the prophet saw all God's judgments on Edom and the nations, which will culminate in the eschaton (end times). All the prophets had difficulty seeing the proximity of the future events that they predicted to one another (cf. 1 Pet. 1:11).

"The opening line of v. 15 therefore constitutes the core of Obadiah's prophecy. It provides a theological framework for the preceding verses: the localized disasters befalling Edom and Jerusalem are not merely isolated incidents in a remote and insignificant theater of war, for they mark the footsteps of the Lord himself as he approaches to set up a 'kingdom that will never be destroyed' (Dan 2:44). And the following verses are essentially a commentary on the implications of that impending 'day.'"⁴⁶

"Edom is presented as the paradigm of all the nations."⁴⁷

v. 16 Edom had her "day" on the Lord's holy mountain, Jerusalem, when she failed to help her brother, Israel. Likewise, all the nations would have their "day" dominating Jerusalem and the Jews, during "the times of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:24). We live in "the times of the Gentiles." This period of history began when Nebuchadnezzar removed Israel's sovereignty in 586 B.C., and will end when Jesus Christ returns to the earth and restores Israel's sovereignty.

During "the times of the Gentiles," Israel is currently being "trodden down by the Gentiles" (Luke 21:24). Obadiah described Israel's enemies as *drinking* "continually" in celebration of their dominion over the Israelites (cf. Exod. 32:6; 1 Sam. 30:16). Though they would celebrate to the point of delirium, God would destroy them, and they would become "as if they had never existed." They would drink the cup of His wrath (cf. Ps. 60:3; 75:8; Isa. 51:17-23; Jer. 25:17-26, 28-29; 49:12-13; Hab. 2:15-16).

⁴⁵D. Baker, p. 38.

⁴⁶Armerding, p. 353.

⁴⁷D. Baker, p. 39.

"The verse apparently precludes any trace of the nations remaining . . . , yet there will be a remnant of various nations in the Millennium (Isa. 2:2-4; Amos 9:12; Mic. 4:1-3; Zech. 14:16-19). How are these two ideas to be reconciled? The answer perhaps lies in the difference between the concept of nations before and during the Millennium. Before the golden age of Messiah's rule on earth the nations consider themselves sovereign and fight to maintain their individual rights. When Christ returns, however, only those from the nations who have called on the Lord's name will enter. Also, they will be under one King and no longer a threat to Israel's existence. Therefore, the nations as we presently know them will exist no more once the Millennium begins. In any case, Obadiah dwells only on the destruction of the old order as far as the nations are concerned."⁴⁸

- v. 17 The future of Israel (restoration) contrasts with the future of Edom (judgment). In that future time of judgment (the Tribulation), there "will be those who escape" from Jerusalem, namely, many Jews (cf. Zech. 13:8; Rev. 12:13-17). Some writers viewed this as taking place during the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.⁴⁹ But Jerusalem did not "be[come] holy," and the house of Jacob did not "possess their possessions" after that event, as this verse predicts. The city would eventually become "holy" (at the Second Coming), and "the house of Jacob," in contrast to the house of Esau, would then "possess" what God intended for them to have (in the Millennium).
- v. 18 The Israelites would then "consume" the Edomites, as "a fire" burns up "stubble" (cf. Exod. 15:7; Isa. 10:17; Joel 2:5; Zech. 12:6; Mal. 4:1; Matt. 3:12; Luke 3:17). Fire is often a tool of divine judgment in Scripture (cf. Deut. 28:24; 32:22). There would be no Edomites left (cf. vv. 8-9; Num. 24:18; Isa. 11:13-14; Ezek. 25:13-14; Amos 9:12), though Israelites would escape from Jerusalem (v. 17).

"Obadiah distinctly mentions the house of Joseph, *i.e.* of the ten tribes, in this passage and in this alone, for the purpose of guarding against the idea that the ten tribes are to be shut out from the future salvation."⁵⁰

"The house of Jacob," in contrast, refers to the Southern Kingdom. This prediction will find ultimate fulfillment during the judgment of the nations after the Second Coming and before the messianic rule of Christ in the

⁴⁸Finley, p. 372.

⁴⁹E.g., Armerding, p. 354.

⁵⁰Keil, 1:370.

Millennium begins. Yahweh again guaranteed the accuracy of this prophecy with His own spoken word (cf. vv. 4, 8).

"Some passages, like v. 18, speak of a military participation by Israel in the judgment of the nations just prior to the Millennium (Zech. 12:1-9; Mal. 4:3 [MT 3:21]), while others depict the Lord carrying out the judgment on behalf of His people (Joel 3:12 [MT 4:12]; Zech. 14:3-5; cf. Matt. 25:31-46). It is difficult to reconstruct the precise order of events. In any case much of the material is evidently not strictly chronological."⁵¹

The Edomites' fortunes ebbed and flowed for centuries following Obadiah's prophecy. The "Herods," including Herod the Great (Matt. 2:1-17), Herod Antipas (Luke 13:31-32; 23:7-12), and Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12:1-11, 23), were all of Edomite descent. But in the second century B.C., the Jews and other enemies virtually consumed the Edomites. It was then that the Edomites lost their national identity and autonomy, which they never regained. So the final destruction of the nation of Edom by Israel took place long before the eschaton.

". . . one could speak of a partial fulfillment of Obadiah's oracles when the Maccabeans and Hasmoneans reclaimed these areas for Israel."⁵²

This took place in the second century B.C. However, Obadiah spoke of "all the nations" (v. 16), not just Edom. He foresaw the destruction of all Gentile powers that dominated the Israelites. Had the Jews accepted Jesus Christ as their Messiah, He would have begun to rule shortly after His crucifixion and resurrection. Since they rejected Him, the final judgment of the nations that the prophets predicted is still future.

B. THE OCCUPATION OF EDOM BY ISRAEL VV. 19-21

This pericope (section of text), as the former one, also has a framing phrase: "the mountain of Esau" (vv. 19, 21). This mountain, of course, contrasts with the Lord's holy mountain: "Mount Zion" (vv. 16-17).

vv. 19-20 Obadiah predicted that Jews living in various parts of Israel would possess parts of the Promised Land that other nations formerly occupied (cf. Isa. 66:8; Zech. 12:10—13:1; 14:1-9). These parts included Mt. Seir (Edom), Philistia, and territories to the north of Judah, including Ephraim and Samaria (the Northern Kingdom), and Transjordan (Gilead).

Formerly exiled Israelites, living to the north near "Zarephath" (in modern Lebanon) and in "Sepharad" (perhaps Sardis in modern Turkey or a territory in Media or Spain⁵³), would return and occupy the southern

⁵¹Finley, p. 373.

⁵²Ibid., p. 374.

⁵³See *The New Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Sepharad," by D. J. Wiseman; and Watts, p. 64.

portions of the land: "the Negev." The location of Sepharad remains a mystery. Israel would again conquer the land, but this time she would subdue it completely and occupy all the territory God had promised Abraham (cf. Gen. 13:14-17; 26:2-5; 28:13-15; Deut. 1:7).

"Was Obadiah's prophecy fulfilled? By Malachi's time (approximately 450 B.C.), Edom had suffered a devastating defeat (see Mal. 1:1-4), though not of the magnitude envisioned by Obadiah. Obadiah's description of Edom's judgment is probably to some degree stylized and exaggerated. However, the cosmic dimension of the prophecy transcends historical developments and points to an end-time judgment of worldwide proportions. When viewed in this larger eschatological context, Edom serves as an archetype for all God's enemies, who will be crushed by his angry judgment (see also Isa. 34 and 63:1-6)."⁵⁴

"Israel will occupy all the land that God promised to them. He had promised to Abraham a land that contains about three hundred thousand square miles. Even at their zenith, they occupied only about thirty thousand square miles."⁵⁵

v. 21 In summary, those who deliver the Jews to their divinely intended destiny "will ascend Mt. Zion" and will "judge" Mt. Seir (cf. Judg. 3:9, 15). Edom will not prevail over Israel, but Yahweh will prove to be sovereign (cf. v. 1). His "kingdom" will extend over the whole Promised Land, even the part that Israel's enemies formerly occupied, and over the people who formerly opposed them. The conquest of the land that Joshua began but did not finish will be complete then. Thus Obadiah's prophecy, this envisioned account of two mountains, ends on a climax with Yahweh's kingdom dominating all the nations, and with Yahweh as King of Kings and Lord of Lords (cf. Rev. 19:16; 20:4). The verse is clearly messianic.

"None of the prophets has a more exalted close than this. . . . No man-ruled empire nor any nation of this world will endure forever. All will one day be merged into that eternal kingdom over which the Lord Jesus Christ will reign in solitary glory."⁵⁶

Amillennial interpreters understand New Testament references to Israel as references to the church. They see the fulfillment of Obadiah's prophecy, not in the restoration of Old Testament Israel to future sovereignty in the Promised Land, but in the final victory of the church over all her enemies.⁵⁷ Premillennialists reject this "replacement theology"

⁵⁴Chisholm, *Handbook on . . .*, p. 406.

⁵⁵McGee, 3:736.

⁵⁶Gaebelein, pp. 46-47.

⁵⁷E.g., Stuart, p. 422; Keil, 1:378; and Allen, p. 172.

(the church replaces Israel in God's program) because we believe when God said "Israel" He meant Israel. It is incorrect, we believe, to conclude that because Christians are the spiritual seed of Abraham, the church is the spiritual seed of Israel.

As the nation of Edom opposed the Israelites, so the Edomites of Jesus' day (Herod the Great and his successors) opposed Jesus Christ and His followers. Our Lord Jesus Christ, who proved to be the fulfillment of all that the nation of Israel was to be, became the personal focus of Herod's hostility, who tried to kill Jesus in His infancy. Yet Herod was unsuccessful. Likewise, all the enemies of Israel, and of Israel's Messiah, will be unsuccessful in doing away with the Savior—and will experience destruction themselves for trying to do so.

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