

OBADIAH**The Name:**

The name Obadiah means “Servant of God”; it is a compound of the Hebrew words *`obed*, “servant,” and *ya*, for “Yahweh.” The book does not give any indication who this Obadiah is or when he lived.

The Topic:

J. Vernon McGee, who used to preach messages on *5-Year Program of Thru The Bible Radio Network*, said in his study of Obadiah: “Obadiah is the shortest book in the Old Testament—only twenty-one verses. There are many folk who feel that this book is not worth reading and that if it were omitted from the Bible, it would not be missed. However, the brevity of the message does not render it less important or less significant. Like the other Minor Prophets, the message is primary, it is pertinent, it is practical, and it is poignant. It is a message that can be geared into this day in which we are living. None of these so-called Minor Prophets are extinct volcanoes; rather, they are distinct action. There is no cold ash in any of them; they are spewing hot lava. Obadiah’s prophecy is of devastating judgment against the little kingdom of Edom.”

Judgment upon Edom is presented as a paradigm for God’s judgment of the nations of this world, particularly as concerns their relationship with the people God has chosen to be the vehicle of His revelation on earth. This thought is expressed plainly in vs. 15 – “The day of the LORD is near for all nations. As you have done, it will be done to you; your deeds will return upon your own head.” J. Sidlow Baxter, in his book *Explore the Book*, calls the content of this prophecy: “Poetic Justice – The penalty corresponding to the iniquity as one line of poetry corresponds to another.”

In New Testament terms the focus is upon the one member of the Jewish nation who is the ultimate incarnation of God’s revelation on earth: Jesus Christ. Every human being will ultimately be judged according to his attitude toward Jesus. Jesus self expressed this in His conversation with Nicodemus: “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.”¹ It is the New Testament light shining on Obadiah’s prophecy that makes this book pertinent to all times.

Date:

Most biblical scholars assign an early date to this book; some even believe it was the first of the Minor Prophets. Although the date cannot be deducted from the content, it could also be as late as during the Babylonian Captivity, when one of the captive poets wrote: “Remember, O LORD, what the Edomites did on the day Jerusalem fell. ‘Tear it down,’ they cried, ‘tear it down to its foundations!’”² Since, however, most prophecy predates the events foretold, the book could have been written anytime.

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary observes: “The prophecy of Obadiah alludes to a historical situation in which the Edomites were allied with the enemies of Israel and participated in the sack of Jerusalem (vv. 10-14). Jerusalem was plundered by the Philistines and Arabians during the time of Jehoram (2 Chron 21:16-17), about the middle of the ninth century. Edom is referred to here as having more than one ally (vv. 7,11). It is known that Edom was allied with the Babylonians and others at the fall of Jerusalem in 587/586 B.C., and participated in the plunder of the city. Probably the prophecy of Obadiah is best dated in that period.”

In the above-mentioned series of radio broadcasts, J. Vernon McGee says about the date: “The chief difficulty with the prophecy of Obadiah is where to fit it into the history of the nation Israel. There are some

¹ John 3:14-21

² Ps. 137:7

who give the date of 887 B.C., which fixes the time during the reign of Jehoram and the bloody Athaliah (II Kings 8:16-26). Dr. Pusey placed it during the reign of Jehoshaphat (II Chronicles 17:7). Although the name Obadiah occurs in that passage, it was a common name in that day and probably was not the same Obadiah. Canon Farrar gave the date as 587 B.C., and Dr. Moorehead concurred in this, suggesting that Obadiah was probably a contemporary with Jeremiah. The whole question seems to hinge on verse 11: 'In the day that thou stoodest on the other side, in the day that the strangers carried away captive his forces and foreigners entered into his gates, and cast lots upon Jerusalem, even thou wast as one of them.' Either this was written as prophecy before it happened or it is a historical record of what did happen. The natural interpretation, of course, is to accept it as history rather than prophecy, which places the date of Obadiah's prophecy around 587 B.C., after the Babylonian Captivity and during the ministry of the prophet Jeremiah."

Israel and Edom:

J. Sidlow Baxter, in his book *Explore the Book*, states: "The Edomite people were like both their father and their country. Their nature was marked by a hard earthiness. They were profane, proud, fierce, cruel; and these tempers found concentrated vent in a strangely persistent, implacable, bitter, gloating spite against Israel, the nation which had descended from the twin-brother of their own national father, Esau. This violent nastiness had expressed itself again and again in the history of the two peoples. A never-forgotten instance of it was way back in the days of Israel's wilderness wanderings, when, with vicious threat, Edom had flung refusal to the courteous appeal of Moses that Israel might be allowed to pass through the Edomite country (Num. xx. 14-22)."

The relationship of Israel and Edom was a long and stormy one. In a way the historic friction can be traced back to Rebecca's pregnancy. We read about this in the account in Genesis: "The babies jostled each other within her, and she said, 'Why is this happening to me?' So she went to inquire of the LORD. The LORD said to her, 'two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger.'"³ As the twins grew up the tension did not ease. Jacob's deceitful acquisition of Esau's birthright in exchange for a bowl of soup typifies it.⁴ When Jacob effectively robbed his brother of the first blessing by deceiving Isaac, Esau exclaimed: "Isn't he rightly named Jacob? He has deceived me these two times: He took my birthright, and now he's taken my blessing!" A footnote to this verse explains: "Jacob means he grasps the heel (figuratively, he deceives)."⁵ The founding fathers of both nations were eventually reconciled when Jacob returned from Paddan Aram to Canaan,⁶ but their offspring continued the feud throughout the centuries.

As we saw, the political tension between the two nations dates from the time when Israel had left Egypt and was about to enter Canaan. We read: "Moses sent messengers from Kadesh to the king of Edom, saying: 'This is what your brother Israel says: You know about all the hardships that have come upon us. Our forefathers went down into Egypt, and we lived there many years. The Egyptians mistreated us and our fathers, but when we cried out to the LORD, he heard our cry and sent an angel and brought us out of Egypt. Now we are here at Kadesh, a town on the edge of your territory. Please let us pass through your country. We will not go through any field or vineyard, or drink water from any well. We will travel along the king's highway and not turn to the right or to the left until we have passed through your territory.' But Edom answered: 'You may not pass through here; if you try, we will march out and attack you with the sword.' The Israelites replied: 'We will go along the main road, and if we or our livestock drink any of your water, we will pay for it. We only want to pass through on foot--nothing else.' Again they answered: 'You may not pass through.' Then Edom came out against them with a large and powerful army. Since Edom refused to let them go through their territory, Israel turned away from them."⁷

³ Gen. 25:22,23

⁴ See Gen. 25:29-34

⁵ Gen. 27:36

⁶ See Gen. 33:4

⁷ Num. 20:14-21

Although God would later say to Israel: “I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated,”⁸ Israel carried its share of the blame in this dysfunctional relationship. In Esau’s reaction to Jacob’s deceptions, our natural sympathy would be more with robust, blustering Esau than with creepy Jacob. God did not choose Jacob for his natural qualities! On the other hand, Edom’s reaction to Israel’s errors went well beyond that which was reasonable. Their cruelty in taking revenge became their undoing. Against this background, we can look at the content of Obadiah’s prophecy.

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary observes: “The prophecy of Obadiah is cast in the form of a criminal trial. An outlaw is identified, brought to justice, and sentenced. The Lord God is the judge who speaks out against the outlaw Edom.” As details of Edom’s cruelty, the *Commentary* mentions the following details:

- “1. Edom is charged with siding with foreigners against Jerusalem in the day when the city was assaulted and taken.
2. And with rejoicing over Judah’s misfortunes, and mocking at her calamities.
3. And with sharing in the spoils of the city when the capture took place.
4. And even with cutting off the retreat of the wretched fugitives.”

When Esau left his father’s house he settled in the region south of the Dead Sea. We read in Genesis: “So Esau (that is, Edom) settled in the hill country of Seir.”⁹ After Israel had entered Canaan, God said to Israel by mouth of Joshua: “I took your father Abraham from the land beyond the River and led him throughout Canaan and gave him many descendants. I gave him Isaac, and to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. I assigned the hill country of Seir to Esau, but Jacob and his sons went down to Egypt.”¹⁰ So Edom’s occupation of the country of Seir was legitimate; God had given it to them.

Evidently, the Edomites blended well into the territory they had acquired. They dug themselves into the mountains and excavate a city of caves, called *Sela* in Hebrew; the Greek called it *Petra*. This fact is referred to by Obadiah, when he states: “You who live in the clefts of the rocks and make your home on the heights, you who say to yourself, Who can bring me down to the ground?” *Easton’s Bible Dictionary* explains: “The caravans from all ages, from the interior of Arabia and from the Gulf of Persia, from Hadramaut on the ocean, and even from Sabea or Yemen, appear to have pointed to Petra as a common center; and from Petra the tide seems again to have branched out in every direction, to Egypt, Palestine, and Syria, through Arsinoe, Gaza, Tyre, Jerusalem, and Damascus, and by other routes, terminating at the Mediterranean.”

King Amaziah son of Joash defeated the Edomites and captured Petra, according to a report in the Book of Second Kings. We read: “He was the one who defeated ten thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt and captured Sela in battle, calling it Joktheel, the name it has to this day.”¹¹ *The Westminster Dictionary of the Bible* states: “The place was rediscovered by Burckhardt in 1812 and has since been visited by various travelers. It lies in the nook of a deep chasm excavated by water on the n.e. flank of Mount Hor. The valley, with branching side valleys, is about 4,500 feet long by 740 to 1,500 broad, and is surrounded on all sides by precipitous sandstone cliffs. The main gorge is called Wadi Musa, the valley of Moses, though probably he was never there. A rivulet traverses it through its whole length. The variegated colors of the rock – red, brown, purple, yellow – add to the beauty of the spot.”

Some Bible scholars believe that Sela or Petra is the same as Bozrah, which is mentioned several times in the prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Amos.

Outline of the Book:

We follow the outline provided by *Nelson’s Bible Dictionary*:

I.	The Predictions of Judgment on Edom	1:1-9
II.	The Reasons for Judgment on Edom	1:10-14
III.	The Results of Judgment on Edom	1:15-16

⁸ Mal. 1:2,3

⁹ Gen. 36:8

¹⁰ Josh. 24:3,4

¹¹ II Kings 14:7

IV. The Possession of Edom by Israel 1:17-21

I. The Predictions of Judgment on Edom verses 1-9*1 The vision of Obadiah.*

This is what the Sovereign LORD says about Edom-We have heard a message from the LORD: An envoy was sent to the nations to say, "Rise, and let us go against her for battle!"-

2 "See, I will make you small among the nations; you will be utterly despised.

3 The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rocks and make your home on the heights, you who say to yourself, 'Who can bring me down to the ground?'

4 Though you soar like the eagle and make your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down," declares the LORD.

5 "If thieves came to you, if robbers in the night- Oh, what a disaster awaits you-would they not steal only as much as they wanted? If grape pickers came to you, would they not leave a few grapes?

6 But how Esau will be ransacked, his hidden treasures pillaged!

7 All your allies will force you to the border; your friends will deceive and overpower you; those who eat your bread will set a trap for you, but you will not detect it.

8 "In that day," declares the LORD, "will I not destroy the wise men of Edom, men of understanding in the mountains of Esau?"

9 Your warriors, O Teman, will be terrified, and everyone in Esau's mountains will be cut down in the slaughter.

The Hebrew word, rendered "vision" is *chazown*, which conveys the idea of "a dream, revelation, an oracle, or a mental picture." Obadiah sees a series of mental pictures, which he reports in vivid language. In the international scene of his day, there was a bustle of political activity of surrounding nations turning against Edom, forming alliances to attack that kingdom. It is difficult to reconstruct the exact situation of that time but the atmosphere in which alliances are made and attacks plotted is not hard to imagine. Somehow, all this political and strategic commotion was orchestrated by God and used to achieve His purpose of punishing Edom for its sin against Israel. In essence, it was God who declared war with Edom.

For those who have traveled in Europe and visited Switzerland, the mentality of the Edomites is not difficult to imagine. My wife and I have visited Switzerland and during one furlough from the mission field, we lived for several months just about one or two miles from the border crossing into Basel. Switzerland is one of the most beautiful countries in the world. Its high snow-covered mountains give it a postcard beauty that takes one's breath away. One cannot travel fast on mountain roads and life is forced to slow down to a step that leads to relaxation and rest. Switzerland knows no rat race. People who are maimed by the stress of life in the fast lane in other places come to Switzerland for healing. The Swiss clocks tick slowly and the mountain air is crisp. Because of the inaccessibility of the Alps, the land has been spared the wars that ravaged the rest of Europe during the last two or three centuries. To be Swiss means to be stable, reliable, peaceful, independent, and affluent. Switzerland's population consists of four people groups that speak French, German, Italian, or Roman; they live together in a model state of peaceful coexistence. The Swiss have all reason to be proud of their achievements. The Swiss watches are the most reliable timepieces in the world, their chocolate is world famous, and money in a Swiss bank account is the safest investment possible in a world of crashes and bankruptcies. There are many Swiss who are wonderful solid Christians who are reaching out to the rest of the world. Some Swiss, however, give the impression that their beautiful country is the fruit of their own hard labor. They take full responsibility for the beauty of the Matterhorn and they would make one believe that the piling up of the rocks that form the Mont Blanc is their handiwork.

Why do we say this? Because it helps us understand the character of the Edomites and the influence the impregnable beauty of their mountainous abode must have had on the formation of their national spirit. The mountains of Seir may be lower than those in Switzerland; the Edomites had come to believe that they had created them with their own hands. The altitude on which they lived physically made them believe that they were above their neighbors in every other aspect of life also.

The Edomites believed themselves not only to be above their fellowmen, they felt they lived on the same level as God. They flew with the eagles and lived among the stars.

While the nations readied themselves for an attack upon Edom, God announced that He would make them small. They would be pulled down from their altitude and from the height of high quality life and reduced to lowliness and despicable poverty.

National pride is not wrong in itself, as long as God is given the credit for the achievements. One can live on sea level and be a mountain dweller in God's country. David knew the secret of life on the highest plane. He sang: "The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold."¹² He prayed the prayer of a mountaineer when he said: ">From the ends of the earth I call to you, I call as my heart grows faint; lead me to the rock that is higher than I."¹³ But the Edomites did not need God to reach the mountaintop.

Edom's attitude toward God and fellowmen is representative of the human heart. An unregenerate person is a rebel in God's sight. The apostle Paul states: "The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God."¹⁴ *Matthew Henry's Commentary* states: "Carnal security is a sin that most easily besets men in the day of their pomp, power, and prosperity, and does, as much as any thing, both ripen men for ruin and aggravate it when it comes."

Edom was headed for a total disaster; when judgment passed over them, nothing would be left. In order to illustrate the extent of the calamity, Obadiah uses three illustrations. Thieves usually do not wipe one out completely; they come at night and steal what they want, leaving the rest behind. Robbers usually attack in broad daylight and use violence, but they leave their victims with something, even if it is only the clothes on their back. Grape pickers, whether passing wanderers or hired hands, never clean a vine of all the grapes. In Israel there even was a law against that. We read in Leviticus: "Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the LORD your God."¹⁵ But when God is through with Edom, nothing will be left to pick. The illustrations were particularly pertinent in the case of Edom, for, as *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* explains: "the Edomites were known as thieves and robbers."

We must always remember that God's announcements of judgment are always acts of grace. They are meant to be warnings that leave open a door of repentance and escape.

His own allies would betray Edom and they in turn would influence Zedekiah, king of Judah, to rebel against Nebuchadnezzar. At one point, God told Jeremiah to send a prophetic warning to the ambassadors of the confederacy of which Edom was a part, who had come Jerusalem to see Zedekiah.¹⁶ As Edom had betrayed his brother Jacob, so his own friends on whom he had counted for protection would betray Edom. *Barnes' Notes* comments: "The proverb which says, 'there is honor among thieves,' attests how limited such mutual faith is. It lasts, while it seems useful. Obadiah's description relates to one and the same class, the allies of Edom; but it heightens as it goes on; not confederates only, but those confederates, friends; not friends only, but friends indebted to them, familiar friends; those joined to them through that tie, so respected in the East, in that they had eaten of their bread. Those banded with them should, with signs of friendship, conduct them to their border, in order to expel them; those at peace should prevail against them in war; those who ate their bread should requite them with a snare."

The same *Commentary* quotes Josephus, who describes the fall of Edom's capital, as the walls of the city began to crumble: "Fear fell on the tyrants, more vehement than the occasion called for. For, before the enemy had mounted, they were paralyzed, and ready to flee. You might see men, aforesaid stouthearted and insolent in their impiety, crouching and trembling, so that, wicked as they were, the change was pitiable in the extreme. Here, especially, one might learn the power of God upon the ungodly. For the tyrants bared themselves of all security, and, of their own accord, came down from the towers, where no force, but famine alone, could have taken them: For those three towers were stronger than any engines."

¹² Ps. 18:2

¹³ Ps. 61:2

¹⁴ Rom. 8:7

¹⁵ Lev. 19:10, see also Deut. 24:21

¹⁶ See Jer. 27:3

The wisdom of Edom was proverbial in ancient times in the east. Jeremiah prophesied: "Concerning Edom: This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Is there no longer wisdom in Teman? Has counsel perished from the prudent? Has their wisdom decayed? Turn and flee, hide in deep caves, you who live in Dedan, for I will bring disaster on Esau at the time I punish him. But I will strip Esau bare; I will uncover his hiding places, so that he cannot conceal himself. His children, relatives and neighbors will perish, and he will be no more.'"¹⁷

Evidently, there were two influential schools of wisdom in that time: Egypt and "the East." When Solomon ascended the throne of Israel, he surpassed in his wisdom both of those schools. We read: "Solomon's wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the men of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt."¹⁸ The wisdom of Edom was manmade. It did not recognize God as its source. It certainly did not meet Solomon's definition of wisdom: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge."¹⁹ Human wisdom has no place for the cross of Jesus Christ and for the salvation that is brought about by it. The apostle Paul describes God's dealing with this kind of wisdom brilliantly in his First Epistle to the Corinthians: "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.' Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength."²⁰

Admittedly, Israel of Obadiah's day was no longer a clear reflector of God's revelation in this world. In that sense, Israel was also to be blamed for Edom's destruction, as Edom was itself. But Edom had a long history of lack of interest in things from heaven. Esau's disregard for God's will and revelation had carried through centuries and generations.

The wisdom of Edom flourished in a period of world history when human wisdom had reached its peak. It was the era of Greek philosophy, the age of Socrates and Plato. But some of these pagan philosophers had come closer to the truth of God than the wise men of Esau's descent. They were Abraham's offspring, but they, like their father Esau, disregarded the revelation God had given to Abraham. The fact that God had chosen Jacob over Esau did not mean that Esau could not have participated in the blessing of Abraham. He had chosen, however, to sell his birthright and everything that came with it. In the day of Obadiah, Edom's wisdom had finally arrived at a dead end. The Edomites had been wise enough to carve out their habitat in the rocks. Like the builders of the Tower of Babel, they had constructed their own safety. When the Day of Judgment arrived, they lacked the only protection that could have kept them safe from the wrath of God. They did not experience the protection of the psalmist of Israel who could testify: "The LORD has become my fortress, and my God the rock in whom I take refuge."²¹

II. The Reasons for Judgment on Edom verses 10-14

10 Because of the violence against your brother Jacob, you will be covered with shame; you will be destroyed forever.

11 On the day you stood aloof while strangers carried off his wealth and foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem, you were like one of them.

12 You should not look down on your brother in the day of his misfortune, nor rejoice over the people of Judah in the day of their destruction, nor boast so much in the day of their trouble.

¹⁷ Jer. 49:7,8,10

¹⁸ I Kings 4:30

¹⁹ Prov. 1:7

²⁰ I Cor. 1:18-25

²¹ Ps. 94:22

13 You should not march through the gates of my people in the day of their disaster, nor look down on them in their calamity in the day of their disaster, nor seize their wealth in the day of their disaster.

14 You should not wait at the crossroads to cut down their fugitives, nor hand over their survivors in the day of their trouble.

Obadiah mentions five sins of Edom for which God condemns them to death. The first one is “the violence against your brother Jacob.” The root of this violence went back to the fathers of both nations. Admittedly, Esau had reason to be upset about Jacob’s deceit in stealing their father’s blessing. But Esau’s reaction went well beyond what a relationship of rivalry between twin-brothers allowed. We read: “Esau held a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing his father had given him. He said to himself, ‘The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob.’”²² In spite of the reconciliation between them when Jacob returned from Paddan Aram,²³ the fire of the feud was kept alive throughout the centuries. There is no excuse for Jacob’s deception, but Esau can be blamed for not accepting God’s choice. His hatred toward his brother was rooted in his rebellion against God.

The violence referred to is, probably, the time during the reign of King Ahaz, when Judah was assailed by the Philistines and we read: “The Edomites had again come and attacked Judah and carried away prisoners.”²⁴ Another instance occurred during the siege and capture of Jerusalem by King Nebuchadnezzar. Edom’s cruelty then is commemorated in one of the psalms composed during the Babylonian Captivity: “Remember, O LORD, what the Edomites did on the day Jerusalem fell. ‘Tear it down,’ they cried, ‘tear it down to its foundations!’”²⁵

The word “shame” catches our attention in God’s verdict. Shame is an indicator of conscience; it is the fruit of a comparison between what is and what ought to be. Although Esau did not follow God’s revelation, he knew of it. On the Day of Judgment the measure of Edom’s light is revealed and he is judged accordingly.

As missionaries among the Stone Age tribes of Papua, on the Indonesian part of the island of New Guinea, we discovered that the people who had lived in isolation for centuries, were able to quote parts of the Ten Commandments: “You shall not murder,” “You shall not commit adultery,” “You shall not steal,” “You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.”²⁶ Their knowledge of these things did not translate into their moral behavior, but the knowledge was there. This knowledge became a solid foundation for the preaching and acceptance of the Gospel. Esau’s shame would be their reaction upon seeing the glory of God and the realization that they had always known about it. Shame will be the reason for which heaven and earth will try to flee from the throne of God on the Day of Judgment.²⁷

The destruction Obadiah foretells here did not come immediately, but Edom had reached the point of no return on its way to ruin. *The Pulpit Commentary* states: “Terrible retribution fell on Idumea in the time of the Maccabees (see 1 Macc. 5:3; 2 Macc. 10:15, etc.; Josephus, ‘Ant.,’ 12:8. 1). Before that time they had been dispossessed of Petra by the Nabathaeans.”

The fall of Jerusalem and its destruction by Nebuchadnezzar’s army had been God’s punishment for the accumulation of Judah’s sins. The fact that God punishes one does not give allowance to others to profit from the situation. We have to deal gingerly with the topic of Hitler’s Holocaust. To state that the European Jews received what was due to them would be terrible injustice. Some Jews may have outsmarted other people after the end of the First World War, when the German people suffered from a runaway inflation of the German Mark, but the death of six million Jews in Nazi concentration camps cannot be interpreted as “eye for eye and tooth for tooth” retribution. What Hitler did with the Jews was demonic and far removed from God’s justice. Few people at that time, however, stepped in and risked their lives to save Jews from

²² Gen. 27:41

²³ Gen. 33:4

²⁴ II Chr. 28:17

²⁵ Ps. 137:7

²⁶ *Mè waggii dà, Mogai dà, Oma dà, Puya mana wegai dà!*

²⁷ See Rev. 20:11

annihilation. Some, however, did so at the risk of their lives. But a ship with Jewish immigrants, sailing to the United States of America, was turned back to Germany and most of those refugees perished in the “Final Solution.”

Edom made no effort to help his brother Jacob escape from the claws of Nebuchadnezzar. As a matter of fact, the Edomites joined the looters. Think of a suitable punishment for people who come in and loot after a tornado or an earthquake strikes, or after a city is bombed! That is human nature at its lowest!

Edom’s crime did not stop at this point. They became actively engaged in Israel’s destruction. Their lack of compassion turned into positive enjoyment of the other’s disaster. Sadistic pleasure is evidence of a complete loss of human feelings. It erases the image of God in a human being as it fails to recognize that image in the other person. The Book of Proverbs states: “He who mocks the poor shows contempt for their Maker; whoever gloats over disaster will not go unpunished.”²⁸ The final touch of Edom’s crime against humanity was their active cooperation with the powers that were involved in Israel’s ruin. Edomites guarded the crossroads where the refugees tried to escape and finished off those that fell in their hands. Those they did not kill were handed over to the enemy for destruction or captivity. As *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comments: “Thus Edom, from malicious looks, proceeded on to malicious words, and from words to deeds—deeds of covetousness, spoliation, and murder.”

We mentioned above that, in the rivalry between Esau and Jacob, both were at fault. Jacob was a creep who hardly deserves our sympathy; Esau, in spite of his boisterous outbursts, was by far the more likable character. But there was in Esau’s heart no place for God. Honest Esau fell into the trap of Satan and allowed himself to harbor feelings of hatred toward his brother. We saw that Esau seriously considered killing his brother Jacob.²⁹ The seed the devil sowed in Esau’s heart at that time never died. In Obadiah’s day it had grown into a plentiful harvest.

It is of the utmost importance that we distance ourselves from the sins of our ancestors and previous generations and cut all ties they may have had with the enemy, lest we inherit their evil and suffer the consequences.

III. The Results of Judgment on Edom verses 15-16

15 "The day of the LORD is near for all nations. As you have done, it will be done to you; your deeds will return upon your own head.

16 Just as you drank on my holy hill, so all the nations will drink continually; they will drink and drink and be as if they had never been.

The announcement of the Day of the Lord does not only pertain to Edom but to “all nations.” The Hebrew word used is *gowy*, which is generally rendered “a Gentile.” Sometimes it can refer to a flight of locusts, but that is probably not meant here. The mention of the Day of the Lord in connection with all nations widens the scope of this prophecy to a universal degree. This is no longer a warning to one particular people; it is a warning to mankind at large. Judgment upon Edom becomes symbolic for God’s judgment upon all the nations of the world.

When Israel was still on its way to Canaan and Balak, king of Moab, tried to engage the prophet Balaam to curse Israel, Balaam prophesied about this Day of the Lord. We read in the Book of Numbers: “I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel. He will crush the foreheads of Moab, the skulls of all the sons of Sheth. Edom will be conquered; Seir, his enemy, will be conquered, but Israel will grow strong. A ruler will come out of Jacob and destroy the survivors of the city.”³⁰ This links Obadiah’s prophecy to Jesus’ words about the day of final judgment: “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.”³¹

²⁸ Prov. 17:5

²⁹ See Gen. 27:41

³⁰ Num. 24:17-19

³¹ Matt. 25:31-33

And Edom will hear Him say to them as a nation: "I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me."³² But the charge against Edom will not merely be a sin of omission!

The physical destruction of Edom foretold by Obadiah will be mild compared to what will happen to Edom on the last day. We understand for Jesus' comparison between Sodom and Capernaum that what happens in judgment on earth is only a vague shadow of the eternal devastation to come. He said: "And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you."³³ Evidently, the fire that fell upon Sodom and Gomorrah in the days of Lot was not God's last Word about those cities.

The linkage among these words of prophecy also makes us again understand that the issue is not only the way the nations of the world treat Israel, but man's attitude toward God's revelation as it is incarnated in the Person of Jesus Christ. Ultimately, only those who accept Jesus for who He is will recognize the image of God in all their fellowmen.

Edom will receive payment in full for what it had done to Israel. *The Pulpit Commentary* refers to Aristotle and quotes: "This law of retribution was the ideal of heathen justice, according to the Rhadamanthian rule, 'If a man should suffer what he hath done, then there would be strict justice.'"

Vs. 16: "Just as you drank on my holy hill, so all the nations will drink continually; they will drink and drink and be as if they had never been" seems to be open for differing interpretations. Some scholars take "you drank on my holy hill" to refer to Judah, others think that it refers to Edom who desecrated the temple mount. In the first case, drinking would be meant metaphorically, in the second, it could be taken literally. *The Pulpit Commentary* leans toward the second meaning, since the prophecy is generally addressed to Edom. Others argue with the same force that it does not refer to Judah, but to Edom's victory celebrations in Jerusalem. Jeremiah gave a prophecy, similar to Obadiah, which would make one believe that the reference is to God's judgment over Judah as an example of judgment to come upon Edom. We read: "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, said to me: 'Take from my hand this cup filled with the wine of my wrath and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it. When they drink it, they will stagger and go mad because of the sword I will send among them.' So I took the cup from the LORD's hand and made all the nations to whom he sent me drink it: Jerusalem and the towns of Judah, its kings and officials, to make them a ruin and an object of horror and scorn and cursing, as they are today; Pharaoh king of Egypt, his attendants, his officials and all his people, and all the foreign people there; all the kings of Uz; all the kings of the Philistines (those of Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, and the people left at Ashdod); *Edom*,³⁴ Moab and Ammon; all the kings of Tyre and Sidon; the kings of the coastlands across the sea; Dedan, Tema, Buz and all who are in distant places; all the kings of Arabia and all the kings of the foreign people who live in the desert; all the kings of Zimri, Elam and Media; and all the kings of the north, near and far, one after the other--all the kingdoms on the face of the earth. And after all of them, the king of Sheshach will drink it too. 'Then tell them, ' 'This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Drink, get drunk and vomit, and fall to rise no more because of the sword I will send among you.' ' But if they refuse to take the cup from your hand and drink, tell them, 'This is what the LORD Almighty says: ' 'You must drink it!' ' 'See, I am beginning to bring disaster on the city that bears my Name, and will you indeed go unpunished? You will not go unpunished, for I am calling down a sword upon all who live on the earth, declares the LORD Almighty.'",³⁵

IV. The Possession of Edom by Israel 1:17-21

17 But on Mount Zion will be deliverance; it will be holy, and the house of Jacob will possess its inheritance.

³² Matt. 25:45

³³ Matt. 11:23,24

³⁴ Italics are mine

³⁵ Jer. 25:15-29

18 The house of Jacob will be a fire and the house of Joseph a flame; the house of Esau will be stubble, and they will set it on fire and consume it. There will be no survivors from the house of Esau." The LORD has spoken.

19 People from the Negev will occupy the mountains of Esau, and people from the foothills will possess the land of the Philistines. They will occupy the fields of Ephraim and Samaria, and Benjamin will possess Gilead.

20 This company of Israelite exiles who are in Canaan will possess [the land] as far as Zarephath; the exiles from Jerusalem who are in Sepharad will possess the towns of the Negev.

21 Deliverers will go up on Mount Zion to govern the mountains of Esau. And the kingdom will be the LORD's.

It seems that the promise of vs. 17 is more than an assurance that the Judean captives will return from Babylonia. In the context of God's judgment over all the nations of the world, this is an open door of escape for those who turn to God. Joel's prophecy gives to Obadiah a much wider scope than the return of a few survivors. We read: "And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the LORD has said, among the survivors whom the LORD calls."³⁶ The apostle Paul picks up on these words and gives them a universal dimension: "For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile-the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'"³⁷ Isaiah adds to this: " 'The Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their sins,' declares the LORD."³⁸

In the context of biblical revelation as a whole, Mount Zion is more than the residence of King David; it is the place where those gather who have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ. John testifies to this in the Book of Revelation, where he states: "Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads."³⁹

If Mount Zion has a meaning beyond a particular location on earth, then "the house of Jacob" will also be more than a group of Jews gathering in Jerusalem. The title stands here for all who share in the victory of Christ, and Edom with all the nations of the world are those who reject God's revelation.

We may also see in this a veiled reference to the suffering and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He drank the cup of the wrath of God as no other human being ever has or will. In His prayer to the Father in Gethsemane, He prayed: "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."⁴⁰ His deliverance in His resurrection from the dead is the basis for the salvation of all who call upon His Name.

The writer of Psalm One compares those who reject God's grace to chaff. Contrasting the wicked with the righteous, he states: "Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous."⁴¹ Obadiah expresses the same thought with a different image: "The house of Jacob will be a fire and the house of Joseph a flame; the house of Esau will be stubble, and they will set it on fire and consume it." There is always an element of judgment in holiness for those who live in sin. The apostle Paul puts it in this way: "For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life."⁴² Few people realize that sin is combustible by nature; it has all

³⁶ Joel 2:32

³⁷ Rom. 10:12,13

³⁸ Isa. 59:20

³⁹ Rev. 14:1

⁴⁰ Matt. 26:39

⁴¹ Ps. 1:4,5

⁴² II Cor. 2:15,16

the elements of destruction inherently in it. Those who practice sin should stay away from those who take holiness seriously. The flying sparks will be their undoing.

All of this can be reduced to the matter of priority of life. If we, like Esau are willing to exchange that which gives meaning and value to life for a bowl of lentil soup, we should not be amazed when soup is all we end up with. But those who make the God's kingdom and His righteousness their primary goal will have everything else in life in abundance also.⁴³

As we saw, Edom's final destruction was still centuries away when Obadiah pronounced this indictment. In the period between the Old and the New Testament, the Nabathaeans took the city of Petra, but the ultimate obliteration of Edom would not occur until the time of the Maccabees.

The people of the Negev in vs. 19 are the nation of Israel. According to *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*; "Another possible translation of this phrase is: "They shall possess the Negev: that is, Mount Esau."

When God spoke to Jacob who was on his flight to Paddan Aram, He said: "Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring."⁴⁴ Those words raise Obadiah's prophecy far above a punishment for Edom and the occupation of its territory by a neighboring nation; they refer to the coming of Israel's offspring, the Messiah, and the blessing of the Holy Spirit upon all who believe in Him.

The Pulpit Commentary states: "Obadiah sees the twelve tribes, once more united, extending their territory on every side; and, to make this evident, he gives certain examples, using Judah and Benjamin as equivalent to 'the people of God,' and their enlargement as denoting the majestic progress of the kingdom of God."

The Septuagint renders vs. 20: "And this shall be the beginning of the captivity of the children of Israel, the land of the Canaanites as far as Sarepta." *The Pulpit Commentary* comments on this: "This would imply that the Ephraimites should be the first to go into exile, and on their return should occupy the territory of the Canaanites on the north. ... The general meaning is that Jewish captives, who have been taken to other lands, shall return and possess the cities of the south. The sentence in the Hebrew is incomplete. Our translators supply, 'shall possess.' ... So the first portion of the verse means, ... the number of Israelitish captives which were found in Phoenicia, into which they had been sold at different times as slaves. Not a general deportation, but only the portion of the people referred to."

The "deliverers" or, as the NKJV calls them "saviors," are in this case God's instrument of judgment. The Hebrew word *yasha*, which is used here, meaning: "to be wide open, or free," also occurs in the Book of Judges. We read there: "But when they cried out to the LORD, he raised up for them a deliverer, Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, who saved them."⁴⁵

The last verse of this prophecy contrasts the two mountains: Mount Zion and the mountains of Esau. *Barnes' Notes* concludes: "He ends, as he began, with Mount Zion, the 'holy hill,' where God was pleased to dwell (Ps 2:6; 68:16), to reveal Himself. In both, is the judgment of Esau. Mount Zion stands over against Mount Esau, God's holy mount against the mountains of human pride, the Church against the world. And with this agrees the office assigned, which is almost more than that of man. He began his prophecy of the deliverance of God's people, 'In Mount Zion shall be an escaped remnant;' he ends, 'saviors shall ascend on Mount Zion;' he began, 'it shall be holiness;' he closes, 'and the kingdom shall be the Lord's.'"

The comparison between these two mountains reminds us of Paul's contrasting of Jerusalem in heaven, which is the equivalent of Mount Zion, with Mount Hagar in Arabia. In his Epistle to the Galatians, he uses some ingenious play-on-words to make the point that there are people who have thrown in their lot with the grace of God, which makes them the recipients of God's promise to Abraham, and there are those who try to obtain entrance into God's favor by paying with their own good deeds. We read: "Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. His son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way; but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a promise. These things may be

⁴³ See Matt. 6:30

⁴⁴ Gen. 28:14

⁴⁵ Judg. 3:9

taken figuratively, for the women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother. For it is written: 'Be glad, O barren woman, who bears no children; break forth and cry aloud, you who have no labor pains; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband.' Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. At that time the son born in the ordinary way persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now. But what does the Scripture say? 'Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son.' Therefore, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman."⁴⁶ Obadiah's message is that grace will win!

Toccoa Falls, GA. 9/26/2003

⁴⁶ Gal. 4:21-31