

# The Book of Obadiah

## Introduction

Of Obadiah we know nothing but his name, which means "servant of Jehovah." There are numerous men mentioned in the Old Testament by that name, but it is impossible to identify any one of these with Obadiah, or to trace him. "The silence of Holy Scriptures as to the prophet Obadiah stands in remarkable contrast with the anxiety of men to know something of him. They hoped that Obadiah might prove to have been the faithful protector of the prophets under Ahab; or the son of the Shunamite, whom Elijah called to life, or the Obadiah whom Jehoshaphat sent to teach in the cities of Judah, or the Levite who was selected, with one other, to be the overseer set over the repair of the temple in the reign of Josiah. Fruitless guesses at what God has hidden! God has willed that his name alone and this brief prophecy should be known in this world" (Dr. Pusey).

Inasmuch as nothing is known of this man of God, nor anything stated under whose reign he uttered his prophecy, the guesses about the time he lived are numerous and very contradictory. The critics have assigned to Obadiah dates removed from each other by above 600 years. We quote again from Pusey's commentary: "The punishment of Edom the prophet clearly foretells, as yet to come; the destruction of Jerusalem, which, according to our version is spoken of as past, is in reality foretold also. Unbelief denies all prophecy. Strange, that unbelief, denying the existence of a jewel--God's authentic and authenticated voice to man--should trouble itself about the age of the casket in which the jewel rests. Yet so it was. The prophets of Israel used a fascinating power over those who denied their inspiration. They denied prophecy, but employed themselves about the prophets. Unbelief denying prophecy had to find out two events in history, which should correspond with these two events in this prophet--a capture of Jerusalem and a subsequent judgment of Edom. And since Jerusalem was first taken under Shishak, king of Egypt, in the fifth year of Rehoboam 970 B.C., and Josephus tells us that in 301 B.C. Ptolemy Lagus treacherously got possession of Jerusalem, unbelieving criticism has a wide range in which to vacillate. And so it reeled to and fro between these two periods, 970 B.C. and 301 B.C."

Obadiah does certainly not belong to the prophets of the captivity, nor to the post-Exilic prophets. The position given to him in the Hebrew arrangement of the prophetic books bears witness to that. The internal evidence shows that he is one of the earliest prophets, if not the earliest. If we turn to Jeremiah 49:7-22 we find a very striking similarity between the words of Jeremiah and the words of Obadiah concerning Edom. The question is whether Jeremiah used Obadiah's words or Obadiah made use of Jeremiah's message. It has been pointed out that it is a peculiar characteristic of Jeremiah that he often leans upon the utterances of the earlier prophets, and in his writing their thoughts, words and symbols are often reproduced. Compare Jeremiah 47 with Isaiah 14:28-32; Jeremiah 47 with Isaiah 15 and 16; Jeremiah 49:1-6 with Amos 1:13-15, etc. When we point out this characteristic of the book of Jeremiah we do not mean to say that this man of God was a copyist, who slavishly copied the utterances of the earlier prophets. He had the books, or scrolls, of the earlier prophets before himself and the Spirit of God led him to use them; thus the Spirit of God repeated through Jeremiah the testimony of his predecessors and confirmed their God-given utterances. Jeremiah knew and possessed the prophecy of Obadiah, so that we can say with certainty that Obadiah is earlier than Jeremiah.

Now, Obadiah in his utterance lays bare the wicked behavior of Edom in a time when Judah and Jerusalem were plundered by hostile forces. The statement of some of the critics that the eleventh verse means only the taking of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar is an assumption. The fact is the prophet does not speak of the destruction of the city, but that Jerusalem was plundered.

Can this historically be located? There can be no question but it must have reference to the time when the Philistines and the Arabs invaded the city in the reign of King Jehoram. Then the Edomites threw off the Judean supremacy (2 Kings 8:20-22; 2 Chronicles 21:8-10). They also

planned a great massacre of the Jews who were in the land of Edom at that time (Joel 3:19; Amos 1:11). It was then that the treacherousness of Edom and its evil spirit became fully manifested. But there can be no question, as we show in the annotations, that the description of their evil spirit against their kin includes the after history, the fall of Jerusalem under Nebuchadnezzar, the opposition of Edom during the times of the Maccabees and the future revival and doom of Edom. It is, therefore, quite well established that Obadiah lived and uttered his prophecy during the reign of Jehoram.

### **Analysis and Annotations**

The brief prophecy of Obadiah is composed of two parts: Verses 1-16 concern Edom and its destruction and verses 17-21 reveal the establishment of the kingdom in Israel and Israel's restoration and victory. We shall give brief annotations to assist in the understanding of this prophecy by making a threefold division:

1. Edom's humiliation and ruin (verses 1-9).
2. Edom's sin against Israel and the day of the Lord (verses 10-16).
3. The kingdom of the restoration of Israel (verses 17-21)

Verses 1-9. In order to understand Obadiah's prophecy, Edom's origin and history must be taken into consideration. The Edomites were the offspring of Esau. Of him it was said that Esau the Elder should serve Jacob the younger. The character of Esau was soon manifested and his offspring soon became powerful. In Genesis 36 we read of the generations of Esau, who is Edom; there the dukes, the national chiefs, are prominently mentioned. Long before Israel had kings, Edom had such rulers, "And these are the kings that reigned in the land of Edom before there reigned any king over the children of Israel" (Gen. 36:31). In Exodus 15 we read of the dukes in Edom being amazed and in Numbers 20 of the King of Edom. His outrageous behavior towards the kin of Edom is recorded in Numbers 20:14-21. Though the children of Israel promised not to drink the waters in the territory of Edom, or take their fruit without paying for it, Edom refused to give Israel passage; while Israel turned meekly away from Edom. Thus Edom branded itself as the enemy of the people of God. They had an undying hatred against the children of Israel, the sons of Jacob. They had an envious dislike of the people of God. Later it was attacked by Saul and conquered for David by Joab (2 Sam. 8). During the reign of Jehoram (or Joram) they revolted and gained independence.

When Judah and Israel began to decline Edom became more and more arrogant and rejoiced in the evil which came upon the people of God. Their dwelling place was the former possession of the Horim, a race which lived in caves in the mountainous region, much like the prehistoric cave dwellers on the North American continent. Edom possessed then the so-called troglodyte dwelling places cut into the cliffs of sandstone; these rocky habitations were suited to their warlike character and gave them the shelter they needed. Hence they are mentioned in verse 3 as "dwelling in the clefts of the rock." The ruins of Petra still bear witness to its former grandeur. The wickedness of Edom continued and when the Chaldeans came to destroy Jerusalem they also seemed to have shown their hatred. We read in Psalm 137:7, "Remember, O Lord, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem, who said raze it, raze it, even to the foundation thereof." They were also in evidence during the Maccabean period and later in the person of Herod the Great, an Edomite, reigned in Jerusalem. The judgment pronounced upon Idumea, their dwelling place, has found a startling fulfillment.

But this does not end the story of Edom; there will be a future revival of Edom and an ultimate history. This will be at the close of the age, when the Lord regathers all Israel and Judah and ten tribes will be reunited, then and before Edom will appear once more in prominence. No one knows where and what Edom is today. One might almost surmise that the Turk must have some connection with Edom in his horrible hatred and outrages against the Armenians, who, as it is

claimed by some, may contain remnants of the ten tribes. But all this is mere speculation. When God's time comes the Edomite will manifest their national, undying hatred against the sons of Jacob, but Israel victorious will lay their hand on Edom (Isa. 11:14).

We read of this future judgment upon the country of Edom, Idumea, in Isaiah 34:5:

"And all the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll, and all their hosts shall fall down, as the leaf falleth off from the vine, and as a falling fig from the fig tree. For My sword shall be bathed in heaven; behold it shall come down upon Idumea, and upon the people of My curse, to judgment." It is unfulfilled to the present time, but it will be fulfilled when "the LORD, hath a sacrifice in Bozrah, and a great slaughter in the land of Idumea" (verse 6), that is, in the future day of the Lord. As the context shows in Isaiah 34:8, it will be that day, "For it is the day of the LORD'S vengeance, and the year of recompense for the controversy of Zion." Then comes the utter desolation of Edom (Isa. 34:9-17; see also Ezek. 25:12-14; 35; Isa. 63:3 and Lam. 4:21-22). While Obadiah's prophecy has been partially fulfilled, it awaits its final accomplishment in the day of the Lord.

The prophecy begins with the announcement that tidings had come from the Lord which was heard by the prophet and by the people; an ambassador is sent forth among the nations to summon them to go up in battle against Edom. The hour for Edom's overthrow has come. The Lord has made them small among the nations. It was pride which brought them low so that they would be greatly despised. As the dwellers in the rocks they thought themselves secure and boasted of it by saying, "Who will bring me down to the ground?" But the humiliation of Edom had been decreed by the Lord and no power could arrest its execution. Their nests were high as the eagles, yea, even so high that their habitations seemed to be among the stars, yet the Lord would bring them down. His destruction would be complete; the spoilers would not be like the thieves, who steal till they have enough; or like the grape-gatherers who leave something behind. There would be a clean sweep, everything searched out, even the hidden things. Even those in whom they trusted, with whom Edom made a covenant would deceive them and prevail against Edom. Those with whom they made an alliance and gave hospitality would turn against Edom and prove treacherous, though they had eaten bread with them. Their friends of the heathen nations, whom they stirred up against Israel, would forsake them completely and the Lord would destroy the wise out of Edom and understanding out of Mount Esau. Even the wise men will not be able to help them; their wisdom and understanding will not avail. Teman is mentioned because it was known for its wise men; Eliphaz, who spoke so well to Job was a Temanite (Job 4:1). And the prophet Jeremiah in his testimony against Edom wrote, "is wisdom no more in Teman? Is counsel perished from the prudent? Is their wisdom vanished?" (Jer. 49:7). But now their wise and valiant ones would be cut off by slaughter.

Verses 10-16. Her sin of violence against her brother Jacob comes now in special remembrance. On account of it shame would cover them and they would be cut off forever. When Jerusalem was in trouble and the Philistines and Arabs plundered the city (2 Chron. 21:16-17), they stood on the other side and revolted (2 Chron. 21:8-10). And more than that, they joined in plundering the city. Thus it was afterwards when the Babylonians came against Jerusalem, Edom rejoiced; they spoke proudly. Perhaps what is recorded in verses 12-14 happened repeatedly. They stretched out their hands for the possession of God's people. They placed themselves at the crossroads to cut off the fugitives and delighted to deliver up into the hands of their enemies the remnant which was left.

All this will be repeated once more, when another great prophecy will be fulfilled and Jerusalem is once more surrounded by hostile nations (Zech. 14:1-5). Not a few superficial Bible students thought when Jerusalem was captured during the war, and all looked bright for political Zionism, that the promises were now being fulfilled. There is coming another siege of Jerusalem, preceding the glorious appearing of the King of Israel, our Lord. That siege is prophetically described by Zechariah. Among those nations will be found Edom once more. Once more they will manifest their

malice and hatred against Jerusalem.

Then, to show the link of connection between the future and the past, the prophet announces the day of the Lord. "For near is the day of Jehovah upon all nations." This day has not yet been. There have been judgments upon nations like Egypt, Babylon and others, nations which were nations of power and culture, which have fallen under the dealings of a righteous God; these judgments of the past did not bring that day which Obadiah announced, of which Joel after him so fully speaks. The day of the Lord upon all nations is future. When it comes it will mean judgment for all nations, including Edom, Moab and others named in the Scriptures of Truth; and that day will be immediately followed by an age of blessing and glory such as the earth and race had never known before. It will bring divine retribution. "As thou hast done will they do unto thee." The nations of the earth will have to drink of the cup of His fury and wrath.

Verses 17-21. The final section of Obadiah's brief prophecy concerns the kingdom, the victory over the enemies and the restoration of His people. Mount Zion will come into its own; there will be deliverance and there shall be holiness. What God had promised to be the remnant of His people will be accomplished, and they will be a holy people and then hold their possessions, all that the Lord in His infinite grace had promised unto them. The house of Esau will be consumed, so that none shall be remaining of Esau, while Israel will occupy Edom's territory.

The saviours mentioned in the last verse of this prophecy (or deliverers) must mean the chosen instruments which go forth to teach all nations and make known the glory of the King in their midst. For "the kingdom shall be the LORD'S."