

Obadiah

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Section 4 of: **The Minor Prophets**

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The Spirit in the prophets constantly looks beyond Israel and Judah, taking notice of the nations of the Gentiles. "An ambassador," as Obadiah speaks "is sent among the heathen," now and again. Thus, Nahum was sent to Nineveh, and now Obadiah is sent to Edom.

But from the very beginning, the Lord had a word or controversy with Edom, as by His prophet He now has. "I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness." Esau was a profane one. He sold his interest in the Lord for a mess of pottage. He was "a man of the field" and "a cunning hunter." He prospered in his generation. He loved the field, and he knew how to use it. He set his heart on the present life, and knew well how to turn its capabilities to the account of his enjoyments.

His history was destined to be a very singular one. It was also to prove, again and again, the occasion of sorrow to God's people, though it will be found that Israel had entailed this sorrow on themselves.

"The elder shall serve the younger" was the word of God in favour of Jacob, ere the children were born. But Jacob did not wait in patience of faith, till the Lord in His own time and way made His promise good. The promise, therefore, gets laden with reserves, and difficulties, and burdens. It shall assuredly be made good in the end; but by reason of this way of Jacob, his unbelief and policy, the elder shall give the younger much trouble.

Accordingly, Esau got a promise from the Lord, through his father Isaac, to this effect, "Thy dwelling shall be the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above, and by thy sword shalt thou live, and shalt serve thy brother; and it shall come to pass, when thou shalt have the dominion, thou shalt break his yoke from off thy neck." (Gen. 27)

All this comes to pass. David, who came of Jacob, set garrisons in Edom, and the Edomites became his servants and brought gifts. But Jehoram, who also came of Jacob, afterwards loses the Edomites as his servants and tributaries. They revolted under his reign, and continue so to this day. (2 Sam. 8: 14; 2 Chr. 21: 8)

But still, "the elder shall serve the younger." This promise is yea and amen. Amos is a witness of this to us, when he says, Israel shall possess Edom. (Chap. 9) And our prophet, Obadiah, is another witness of the same, telling us that by and by saviours shall come to Zion, and judge the mount of Esau. (See ver. 21) In early days the Lord gave Mount Seir to Esau for a possession; and what He gave him He would preserve to him; and accordingly, He would not let Israel, as they passed along the borders of the land of Edom, in their wilderness-journey, to touch with hostile hand a village or a rood of it. But long after all this, not only after the wilderness-journey of the children of Jacob, but after the times of David and of Jehoram, Edom made fresh trouble for himself, as we read in this prophet. He made merry in the day of Jacob's captivity. He looked on his brother with congratulation and malice, "in the day that he became a stranger." He rejoiced in the fall of Jerusalem under the sword of the Chaldean. Even Moab might have been a dwelling-place for the captives of Zion; (Isa. 16: 4;) but Edom stood in the way to cut them off.*

*No time is given to this prophecy, but it must have been uttered between the destruction of Jerusalem and that of the land of Edom by the Chaldeans, God's sword in that day.

The Lord needs no more. He has a word for Edom because of this, and He utters it through Obadiah. For God's controversy with *the Gentiles* is this, that in the day when He was angry with His people, they had helped forward the affliction. This we read in Zech. 1: 15. How much more, then, may we expect to find him angry with Edom, Jamb's brother, for looking on him in the day of his calamity!

And the Lord of hosts is jealous for Jerusalem with great jealousy. Because Zion is His set on earth; He has linked His name with Israel. "Israel is the lot of His inheritance." He is "the God of Israel." Despite of that people is, therefore contempt of His glory and defiance of His power. Accordingly, Babylon and Edom may well be put together, as they are in Psalm 138. Edom rejoiced in the ruin which Babylon wrought. Nimrod and Esau may be tracked in the same field, hunters before the Lord; the one the bold defier of the God of judgment, the other the profane despiser of the God of blessing. Babylon is never restored, neither is Edom. The, judgment of the millstone awaits the one, perpetual desolations the other. (Jer. 51; Ezek. 35) Nimrod of the loins of Ham, and the circumcised Esau, who comes even of Abraham according to the flesh, may lie together as in the same pit.

Surely we may say again that this laying of hands upon Israel, this despite and hatred of Zion, whether by the Assyrian, by Babylon, by Edom, or any other, is a bold act, bespeaking contempt and defiance of God Himself, because God was with Israel. As Ezekiel expresses it, "God was them." (See Ezek. 35: 10.) And this fact the enemies of Israel ought to have felt. Even had they been employed as the Lords rod upon His people, they should have executed their commission under the sense of what Israel was or had been; just in the spirit of the mariners and shipmaster, when they were casting Jonah into the sea. But this was not so. The Assyrian had once said, "Shall I not, as I have done unto Samaria and her idols, so do to Jerusalem and her idols?" The Chaldean had "brought the vessels of the house of God into the treasure-house of his god." And now the Edomite "entered into the gate of God's people in the day of their calamity." And surely all this was after the pattern of apostate Egypt in the first days, who said, "Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice to let Israel go?"

Thus it has been, and thus will it be, as the judgment of the Son of man in the day of His throne of glory lets us learn: "inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it not to me." (Matt. 25)

All the prophets who have spoken of Edom have given that people the same character, and have found in them the same causes of God's controversy with them. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, and the Psalmist have a kindred burthen for Edom. Profaneness or infidel suffering, pride, hatred of Israel, these are Edom's common marks, the posts upon Esau. Hatred of Israel is noticed in the history, as well as by the prophets. (See 2 Chr. 28: 17) The world was Esau's portion, While Israel was still a stranger and a pilgrim. His children had their dukedoms, were kings also, and had their cities; were settled, as in the clefts of the rocks, where eagles made their nests; and all this while Jacob's children were still but houseless wanderers in lands that were not theirs, or , in wasted deserts.

According to all the moral account given of them, the Edomites are called the people of God's curse, (Isaiah 34) and "the people against whom the Lord has indignation for ever: (Mal. 1) and, addressing Himself to the land of Edom, the Lord says, "When the whole earth rejoiceth, I will make thee desolate." (Ezek. 35)

Amalek, I may observe, came of Esau; and we know what place Amalek fills in the page of Scripture. Agag belonged to Amalek and Haman to Agag: Doeg likewise. He as an Edomite, and so is he called; and a true Edomite, a man of blood he was. And when the Lord arises for the avenging of

Israel, for the recompense of the controversy of His people, "the day of the heathen," as it is called, the land of, Edom is presented to us by the prophets as the scene of that solemn action, as the gathering-place of the confederated hostile nations, and where the Lord in judgment meets them. (Isa. 63)

I think we may see, from all Scripture, that God has a special question with this people. Edom was kindred with Israel, a blood-relation, as we speak. Israel had spared Edom in their passage through the wilderness, under the direct command of the Lord. God's claims on Edom, and that too in company with Israel, were peculiar; and He seems to be treated as the servant who had earned many stripes, having known his Lord's will, and yet did it not.

But short as Obadiah's word is, it does not close without taking notice of the kingdom that follows the judgment. And this is so with all the prophets. Resurrection follows upon death, the kingdom and its glories succeed the judgments. Jesus the Lord never speaks of His death alone, but of His resurrection after it. His prophets, who spake by His Spirit, never speak, I may say, of the judgments which are to cleanse the earth, without telling of the glory that is to follow. And according to this, here in Obadiah we see, at the end, Zion established and had in admiration; her king, the king of glory, seated in her when Edom has become a desolation. When the mount of Esau is judged, and salvation shall rejoice on mount Zion, and holiness find its sanctuary there.