

what it applies to, but has a major difficulty attached to it which rules it out. Under the Historic interpretation the fulfilment eventually reaches the return of Christ, the establishment of the Kingdom and beyond. This cannot be fulfilled twice. There can therefore be no dual fulfilment of all the prophecy, only of part of it. At two points at least (since, as previously explained,

there are two sequences in the prophecy, 6:1–11:18 and 11:19 onwards) the prophecy must cease to be dual fulfilment and become single fulfilment. There can be no dual fulfilment of continuous prophecies like those in Daniel and Revelation which run forward to the return of Christ and beyond.

(To be concluded)

The prophecy of Obadiah— about to be fulfilled

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OBADIAH IS A prophecy of two halves. The first is a prophecy of Edom's downfall. The second is a prophecy of the conquest by Israel of a greatly extended territory prior to and at the establishment of the Kingdom of God, when the prophecy of judgement on Edom widens into a judgement involving all nations.

Date

The book, I believe, was written about 605 to 600 B.C., slightly earlier than the date most commentators state. My reasons are as follows:

- 1 There are similarities between Obadiah vv. 1-9 and Jeremiah 49:7-22, where Jeremiah alludes to no less than eight of the verses in Obadiah. However, he does this in a scattered manner, interspersing them with his own material. This suggests that Jeremiah was quoting from an existing prophecy rather than vice versa. In this case Obadiah was not only a contemporary of Jeremiah, but his prophecy was slightly in advance of the date when Jeremiah 49 was written.
- 2 The prophecy is in fact warning Edom about its attitude to the conquest of Judah and Jerusalem by Babylon. It is true that the AV renders verses 11-13 in the past tense; for example, "thou shouldest not have looked", and "neither shouldest thou have rejoiced". However, commentators consider such renderings to be mistranslations, with the correct translation being "do not". The RV, for example, translates the phrases as imperatives throughout, such as "look not thou", "rejoice not", and "neither speak proudly".

This clearly indicates warning about future actions rather than reproof for past ones.

- 3 There is an absence of any allusion to Nebuchadnezzar's conquest or the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. It is inconceivable that these would not have been mentioned if they had already occurred.
- 4 Most prophets give a short-term prophecy that would indicate to the hearers (particularly the priests, whose role it was to confirm their status as prophets) when it came true that they were indeed prophets of God. They would also give, of course, a prophecy with a longer-term fulfilment, often about the day of the Lord and the establishment of the Kingdom of God. So the message of Obadiah was initially directed to Edom, prior to the invasion by Nebuchadnezzar of Judah and Jerusalem, warning them not to gloat over the destruction of Judah, and warning them of similar and worse treatment if they did.

The reason for the book

Obadiah wrote this prophecy at God's behest against Edom because of the long history of friction between the two nations. The nation of Edom was, of course, descended from Esau, who, having driven out the original Horites, occupied the land of Edom, or Mount Seir, at the time of the return of Jacob from Mesopotamia. Mount Seir was accordingly called the Mount of Esau. Esau and Seir appropriately both mean 'hairy' or 'rough', see Genesis 25:25.

Later, friction arose when the Israelites on their way to the Promised Land sought permission to pass through Edomite territory and this was re-

fused. Notwithstanding this hostility, an Edomite was still to be regarded, according to the Mosaic Law, as a brother of the Israelites.

At a later date, Saul fought against them, whilst David put garrisons there after conquering the country. Hadad, of the royal line of Edom, escaped to Egypt and later became an active enemy of Solomon. After the death of Ahab, and during the reign of Jehoshaphat, the Edomites, in alliance with Moab and Ammon, invaded Judah but were defeated. In the reign of Jehoshaphat's son Joram, or Jehoram, the Edomites revolted, and Joram defeated them once more but failed to keep them in subjection. Later, Amaziah defeated them in the valley of Salt, and put 10,000 to death by flinging them from the top of a rock; whilst in the reign of Ahaz the Edomites invaded Judah and carried off captives.

Thus for hundreds of years relationships between the two countries were strained. The final outrage was the Edomites' invasion of Judah while Jerusalem was being sacked by the Babylonians in 587 B.C. Of course, the fact that God had rejected Esau in no way exonerates the behaviour of Edom. Her failure to assist Israel, and her open aggression, were reprehensible in view of the fact that they were related to the Israelites.

The message of Obadiah

In **verse 1** we are told that the book is the vision of Obadiah, and that he was commissioned to pass it on as the Word of God. The prophecy opens with the assertion that the move to destroy Edom has come from God, who has sent an ambassador to this effect to the nations. This messenger may have been an actual person, or even an angel, but is more likely to refer to God's method of using the political ambition of the nations for this purpose. For example, Nebuchadnezzar was God's servant in His judgement on Judah and Jerusalem (Jer. 25:9-11) and against the nations round about. Alternatively, there may have been a conspiracy under way between some of Edom's allies, as indicated by Obadiah verse 7. Verse 1 also tells us that the nations to whom the messenger was sent were all the kingdoms of the earth, "the heathen"; and so, as a result, there is a general move to "rise up" against Edom to battle.

In **verse 2** Edom is addressed directly: "I have made thee small among the heathen [nations]". Here again the AV translates in the past tense, but commentators say the text should be trans-



Petra

lated as future, and thus the RSV gives, "I will make you small", "you shall be utterly despised". In modern language we would say that they would be cut down to size. When God's power is contrasted with that of men then they see how weak and futile are man's efforts in comparison. Jeremiah has a parallel section in 49:14-16.

In **verse 3** Obadiah denounces Edom's pride. The Edomites thought that their strongholds were invincible, but they would be utterly destroyed. Edom occupied the mountainous region south-east of the Dead Sea. The capital Sela, now Petra, was perched high on a plateau above a sheer rock cliff approached by a narrow gorge. It was virtually impregnable. Many of its inhabitants dwelt in caves dug out of the rock, and the name means 'rock' or 'cliff'. The area was considered by the inhabitants to be inaccessible to invading armies, and this added much to their pride. It seems that the words, "thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock", were a play using the Hebrew word for 'rock', *selah*, for this was the name of their capital. Its later name, Petra, means 'rock' in Greek, and today Petra, with its dwellings cut out of the rock, provides remarkable confirmation of the prophet's description. From

mountain strongholds like this the Edomites launched their raids on Judah. The charge laid against them by Obadiah was one of pride of heart, encouraged by their fortress home.

In **verse 4** God compares the Edomites to an eagle which makes its nest on high, among inaccessible rocks, impervious to attack. The eagle is, of course, a proud and regal bird, noted for its strength and cruelty; and although, like the eagle, Edom had made its home in high places, compared also with the stars, yet they would be brought down. On a political level these words may also refer to the confidence they placed in their alliance with the ruling powers in Babylon; note the similar language to be found in Isaiah 14:12,13.

In **verse 5** God makes the point that even thieves steal only what is valuable or useful to them and leave the rest behind, and similarly grape pickers would leave some grapes for the gleaners; but Edom's ruin, to be brought about by God, would be complete. Edom would be left bare, annihilated. Jeremiah 49:9 is a similar prophecy. They were to be completely cut off, says God.

Verse 6 makes it clear that Edom was to be ransacked and pillaged, and even its hidden treasures were to be searched out and taken. Edom was to be stripped bare and completely robbed of all its treasures. This was to be God's punishment, and would take place despite their treasures being hidden deep in the rocks. In contrast to this, Israel's punishment was to be partial in that a remnant would remain.

Edom's allies, her intimate allies, those who ate bread with her (**verse 7**), were traditionally Ammon and Moab. These, together with Tyre and Sidon, united with Edom to resist Nebuchadnezzar. At first Edom allied herself with Nebuchadnezzar against Judah, but later plotted with her friends against him. But we are told by Obadiah that Babylon would be used by God to punish Edom, and then even her close allies would deceive her and lay a snare under her, they would drive her fugitives back to her own border rather than give them shelter themselves.

In that day, says **verse 8**, in the day of Edom's destruction, all the wise men in whom Edom put their trust and confidence for their security would be destroyed.

Verse 9 informs us that Edom's warriors were to be cut off, even those from Teman, the southern district of Edom (Teman means 'south'). This was in order that all the nation might be cut off

and cease to exist; God was looking for the destruction of the whole nation.

The reason is given in **verse 10**. It was because of their violence against their brother Jacob, or Israel. Israel had been instructed not to hate Edomites, because they were brethren; they were even to admit them into the congregation of the Lord, as Deuteronomy 23:7,8 makes clear. Edom, however, had adopted a consistently hostile attitude toward Israel, and this would culminate in a cry of exultation at Nebuchadnezzar's sack of Jerusalem.

Obadiah charges Edom with violence against his brother Jacob (the term Jacob, of course, being the counterpart to Esau), and declares that he shall be cut off for ever. So this prophecy depicts the final outcome of the age-old controversy between the sons of Isaac.

Fulfilment of the blessings of Isaac

Genesis 27 records the blessings of Isaac upon Jacob and Esau. Verse 29 records the blessing given to the devious Jacob. Here it was forecast that Esau and his descendants would be Jacob's servants and would pay homage to Israel. In verse 40 it was prophesied that Esau would live by the sword and serve Israel, but that at some point they would break the yoke of Israel off their necks. Now we can see the motivation of the Edomites over the years in seeking revenge on Israel.

Genesis 25:30 records Esau's name change from Esau, meaning 'hairy' or 'rough', to Edom, meaning 'red', because of his desire for the red pottage. There was an important principle involved here, for the word usually translated 'red' is *adam*, from which the name Adam comes. Esau sinned in rejecting the birthright, and was called Edom because he demonstrated his Adamic nature. As such his final punishment will be completed by the sacrifice of his typical descendants in the shedding of their blood.

In Obadiah's prophecy God declares that because of the violence of Edom they would be "cut off for ever" (v. 10), which historically came to pass, but not all at once. Edom's crimes were all the worse because they had been committed against a brother nation, and so they would be covered with shame, implying nakedness, before being destroyed for ever. There is no defence, for the words used clearly indicate that Edom will be obliterated by God for ever.

Verse 11 and the succeeding verses, as stated above, need to be viewed as referring to a time

future to the prophecy and not to the past. The fact that the Edomites were to stand on the other side while strangers spoiled Israel suggests clearly that Edom was not to be the main aggressor but a mere ally. The subjection of Israel is prophesied, for the foreigners enter the gates of Jerusalem and divide up the city by lot. In this day of Israel's calamity Edom would not only rejoice, but would actually enter the city to loot it. They would also cut off the escape of fugitives fleeing for their lives, and hand them over to be sold as slaves. For these crimes against his brother Jacob, and for not listening to the prophecy of Obadiah and his warning, Edom is to be cut off for ever.

When Babylon marched against Jerusalem and the city was breached, Edom also attacked as an enemy of his brethren. In this action Edom rejected the ties of brotherhood with Jacob and therefore lost all claim to the mercy of God.

In the day

"On the day", or "in the day of", are key terms in Obadiah. They occur eleven times, climaxing in "the day of the LORD". But there are two distinct periods referred to, "the day of the LORD" and a day of misfortune, the day when Babylon destroyed Jerusalem.

Verse 12 in the RV and RV margin reads, "Look not thou on the day of thy brother, in the day that he was made a stranger, and rejoice not over the children of Judah in the day of their destruction, neither speak proudly in the day of distress". But when Judah was taken captive to foreign lands Edom rejoiced and mocked God's people; as a consequence God would mock Edom.

In **verses 12-14** there are eight rebukes of both a general and a specific nature against Edom, where God warns them not to get involved in the action being taken by Nebuchadnezzar against Israel. In **verse 13** in particular, Edom is urged not to get involved in Israel's misfortune by entering their land, nor by taking their belongings in the day of their calamity and disaster (see RSV). Edom was warned not to help in hunting down the refugees and those escaping from the affliction of Nebuchadnezzar's invasion, but they did not listen, and killed those who fled from the face of the invader.

Psalms 137:7 records Edom's reaction to Judah's misfortune, crying that Jerusalem should be torn down to the foundations. Ezekiel 35 records God's anger against Edom as a consequence, and the judgements that He will bring

upon it, making their land waste and a desolation. The reason is given in verse 10: "Because thou [Edom] hast said, These two nations and these two countries shall be mine, and we will possess it [take possession of them, RSV]". As Edom had helped to desecrate the holy things of God and His people, so God would bring calamity upon Edom.

History records that God's judgements were brought about. The Babylonians turned against the Edomites after the destruction of Jerusalem and brought them to heel. In the fifth century B.C. tribes from Arabia took Edom. In the third century the region was overrun by the Nabateans, who built the existing rock city of Petra. Some Edomites settled in southern Judah, but Judas Maccabeus retook Hebron and the other towns which the Edomites occupied.

Later, John Hyrcanus compelled the Edomites to submit to the rite of circumcision, and incorporated them into the Jewish people; thus they finally became treated as their brethren. The Herods were Edomites (or Idumeans, to use the Greek equivalent). After A.D. 70 the Edomites as a people entirely disappear from history, and God's judgements and prophecies upon them are complete.

Obadiah now goes on to foretell the return of Israel to possess a greatly extended land (in contrast to dispossessed Edom), including former Edomite territory.

The day of the Lord

In **verse 15** the judgement on Edom merges into a wider prophecy involving judgement upon all nations: "the day of the LORD is near upon all the heathen". In so doing God will bring salvation to the house of Israel. It will be the day of triumph for the conquering lion of the tribe of Judah.

In Amos 9:11,12 God tells us that Judah will be restored and will possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations that bear His name. These verses are quoted in Acts 15:15-17, where James before the elders and apostles used them as evidence that the Gentiles are included in the purpose of God, though James substitutes 'Gentiles' for 'nations' and omits Edom, indicating that the prophecy is now enlarged and Edom is now presented as a type of the Gentile nations.

Verse 16 tells us that, as the Edomites had profaned God's holy mountain by drinking there, so the nations will drink, but their drink is the bitter potion of God's judgement, which they

will be compelled to keep on drinking. As Edom had revelled in drunkenness, so would all the nations upon the holy mountain; but the cup God would give them would be that of His wrath, and the power of the nations would disappear as Edom's had done. Isaiah 63:1-6 records that the Lord Jesus will come via Edom as he destroys all opposition to his rule. Particular emphasis is made of the words 'red' and 'blood', and in verse 6 we have the same prophecy that the Gentiles will be drunk as a result of his fury.

Verse 17 tells us that on Mount Zion there will be deliverance. The blessings on Jacob now begin. Obadiah gives a vision of glorious deliverance for God's people. This is, of course, the subject of many prophecies in Scripture. It is the climax of hope for God's people, the time when the benefits of God's covenant will again be enjoyed and His people will be saved (see also Joel 2:32). Zion will be the place of God's triumph, and the dwelling place of His remnant. Notice that the AV margin of Obadiah verse 17 says that upon Mount Zion shall be "they that escape" (*cf.* RV), or "the remnant"—it is the same word. "There shall be holiness", and this will not be marred by the presence of the unclean of the nations, or the Canaanites, as Zechariah 14:21 puts it, the traffickers and merchants, like those that Jesus threw out of the temple. Israel will regain the possessions which they had lost.

In **verse 18** Israel is now referred to as the house of Jacob and the house of Joseph, in order to signify the reunion of the northern and southern kingdoms. Ezekiel 37:15-22 speaks about the joining of the sticks of Judah and Ephraim. These are to act as the means of God's judgements on the house of Esau, or the nations, devouring them with fire. The language in Obadiah is very reminiscent of that in Zechariah 12, where in verse 2 Jerusalem is described as "a cup of trembling", a cup of poison, as the margin makes clear, to all who will be engaged in the siege against it. In verse 6 in particular, in the reference to "the governors of Judah" being "like an hearth of fire among the wood, and like a torch of fire in a sheaf", devouring "all the people round about, on the right hand and on the left", we have the language of Obadiah, "the house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau [or the Gentiles] for stubble".

I originally thought that this referred to the Six-Day War of 1967, when the Israelis rapidly defeated the surrounding Arab nations, taking the West Bank, East Jerusalem to control the

whole of the city, the Gaza Strip, Sinai and the Golan Heights, that is, territory "on the right hand and on the left"; and, of course, Jerusalem was then "inhabited again in her own place" (Zech. 12:6). But since then Israel has been giving land back. But it is clear from Scripture and current political events that Jerusalem is going to be the flash point. The Arabs want it back, claiming it as their capital, but the Jews will not give up their holy capital city. That is why Jerusalem will be "a cup of trembling", and that is why Zechariah 12:9 says that all nations will come against it. The Lord Jesus will then return, as verse 10 describes, and God will destroy all those nations, as 14:2-4 goes on to say. Obadiah verse 18 tells us that those nations will be kindled and devoured.

Psalm 83 gives us some information about the nations that will conspire to attack Jerusalem. Heading the list is "the tabernacles [or houses] of Edom". Also listed are Moab, Ammon and the Philistines, with other peoples who settled in the land of Canaan and its surrounding lands mentioned also. Ten nations in all are listed as seeking to destroy the Jews and take their land.

In verses 13-15 we have the same language as in Obadiah verse 18 and Zechariah 12:6: "As the fire burneth a wood, and as the flame setteth the mountains on fire; so persecute them with Thy tempest". As Zechariah 14:3 puts it: "Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when He fought in the day of battle", in Old Testament times.

Verses 19 and 20 list the territory that will be reconquered by Israel: the mount of Esau or Edom (land to the south and east of the Dead Sea); the plain of the Philistines (the Gaza Strip, as we would call it today); the fields of Ephraim and Samaria (known more usually today as the West Bank); Gilead (land to the east of the River Jordan); territory as far as Zarephath in southern Lebanon (part of which was until recently occupied by the Israelis as a security zone); and finally the south (the Negev).

"They of the south shall possess the mount of Esau", we are told. Isaiah 63, quoted above, speaks of one "that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah" (v. 1), and Deuteronomy 33:2 says: "The LORD came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; He shined forth from mount Paran, and He came with ten thousands of saints". It is clear, therefore, that those from the south who visit God's judgements on Esau are the Lord Jesus Christ and his saints.

Obadiah goes on to say in **verse 21**: “saviours shall come up on Mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be the LORD’S”. In ancient times God raised up saviours to deliver His people from their oppressors, as Gideon did, for example, from the Midianites. Such deliverers will come again to Mount Zion, and will occupy positions of power there, as Isaiah 2:2-4 makes clear. Edom, and by implication all nations, will be subdued, and God will reign supreme over all people from His holy mountain.

The message of Obadiah for us

World political events are moving inexorably to the Divinely ordained conclusion, with current

friction between Jew and Arab leading to a conflict between them. This indicates, I believe, that the time left before the return of the Lord Jesus must be very short. Jesus exhorted us to watch, to be prepared with oil in our lamps, and to bring forth fruit to his holy name by working in his vineyard.

Never before have these words been so important. Let us heed the signs of his return, and work out our salvation with fear and trembling, so that when he returns we may all receive a welcome into his Kingdom, and hear those marvellous words: “Well done, thou good and faithful servant . . . enter thou into the joy of thy Lord” (Mt. 25:21).