

BIBLE COMPANION COMMENTARY: OBADIAH

OBADIAH

PREFACE

This commentary is based around the New European Version of the Bible, which is generally printed with brief commentary on each chapter. This commentary is the hard copy of the more detailed commentary found on the *Bible Companion* app.

Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But don't fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it, respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

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Duncan Heaster

OBADIAH CHAPTER 1

Obadiah:1 *The vision of Obadiah. This is what the Lord Yahweh says about Edom-* Edom, which is Esau Jacob's brother (Gen. 36:8), often joined in the attacks of others upon Judah and Jerusalem. Jeremiah's prophecy against Edom seems to quote Obadiah's (Jer. 47:9-22). I say Jeremiah quotes Obadiah because Jeremiah is full of quotations of earlier prophecies against nations: against the Philistines (Jer. 47:1-7 = Is. 14:28-32), the Moabites (Jer. 48 = Is. 15:1-9; 16:1-14), the Ammonites (Jer. 49:1-6 = Am. 1:13-15), Babylon (Jer. 50,51 = Is. 13:1-14:23) and against Damascus (Jer. 49:23-27 = Am. 1:13-15). The style of Jeremiah's prophecy against Edom is different to those passages where Jeremiah is giving his unique material. Israel and Judah are both in view in :10. The references to Jerusalem being taken do not have to refer to the Babylonian invasion, as Jerusalem was plundered several times before that; by the Egyptians (1 Kings 14:25,26; 2 Chron. 12:2), by the Arabians and Philistines in the time of Jehoram (2 Chron. 21:16,17); by Joash of Israel (2 Kings 14:13,14; 2 Chron. 25:23,24); by the Babylonians at the time of Jehoiakim (2 Kings 24:1; 2 Chron. 36:6,7). Joel 2:32 quotes Obad. 17 ("as Yahweh has said"). So we can conclude that Obadiah was prophesying well before the final Babylonian invasion of Jerusalem and Judah. I suggest that Obadiah's prophecy was originally given at the time of Jehoram, when the Edomites rebelled against Judah (2 Kings 8:22; 2 Chron. 21:10). They joined in with the Arabians and

Philistines in sacking Jerusalem, and the Philistines gave the captives of Judah to the Edomites to abuse (Am. 1:6,9).

When the Egyptians sacked Jerusalem (1 Kings 14:25,26; 2 Chron. 12:2), the Edomites joined in (Joel 3:19). They likewise assisted the Babylonians (Ps. 137:7); and they would have been included within the general term "Arabians" who assisted the Philistines in destroying Jerusalem in the time of Jehoram (2 Chron. 21:16,17), and Am. 1:6,9 speak of the Philistines and Edomites together abusing the captives of Judah.

We may wonder why the main perpetrators (Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, the Philistines) are not singled out for such condemnation; why do we have in Obadiah an entire prophecy against a minor player? In my early days of school teaching, I had to break up a fight between two boys behind the bicycle sheds. A ring of boys stood observing, but one boy was in the ring with the other two, full of blood lust, jumping up and down and inciting one of the fighters to grievously hurt the other, shouting abuse at that other fighter. My anger was particularly against that boy rather than the protagonists. And this then would be one of the major lessons from a minor prophet; that God likewise views the ancillaries to conflict as worthy of even more condemnation than the protagonists. And we need to think that through in the context of our own lives.

Further, Edom or Esau was singled out for such special condemnation because he was Jacob's brother (:10). This was not the case for the Egyptians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Philistines etc. Jacob and Esau were admittedly somewhat separated, and Jacob hadn't been the best brother to Esau. But they were still brothers, and God expected much better of Esau / Edom than He did of the others. And here too we find a penetrating challenge. Our brethren whom we may view askance, from whom we may be separated by the way life has gone for us, are still our brothers. And we are judged very sensitively according to our attitudes toward them, especially in the time of their distress, however justified we may feel that distress to be.

We have heard news from Yahweh- It was the duty of prophets to share with others the "news" revealed to them from Yahweh. The "we" could refer to a school of the prophets centred around Obadiah. Or the "we" could refer to the Angels.

And an ambassador is sent among the nations- The Hebrew for "ambassador" is also translated "messenger", which is also what the Hebrew for "angel" means. So perhaps an Angel is in view, sent amongst the nations to stir them up to a battle which would result in the destruction of Edom.

Saying, Arise, and let's rise up against her in battle- The judgment of Edom was to result in the restoration of Israel's Kingdom. This could have happened at various points in the history of Judah and Israel, but it didn't, because Israel didn't repent and the restoration was not conducted spiritually. The ultimate fulfilment of this prophecy, as of all prophecy, will be in the last days.

Obadiah:2 *Behold, I have made you small among the nations. You are greatly despised-* The past tense here must be compared with the present tense of :3 used about Edom's pride at that time. It is therefore a prophetic perfect- God's word, both of judgment and salvation blessing, is so certain of fulfilment that it can be spoken as having already happened. The parallel in

Jer. 49:15 uses the future tense: "I *will* make you small among the nations". This is why there are passages which speak of the believer's salvation as if it has already occurred, whereas at this point in human time we are still mortal. It was Israel / Jacob who were made small among the nations; Jacob was the "younger", s.w. 'smaller', son compared to Esau (Gen. 27:15,42). Esau / Edom was to receive the judgment of Jacob. This is a major theme of the Apocalypse, that Israel's enemies suffer as she suffers; the seals of judgment upon Israel are in essence repeated in the vials of judgment upon the surrounding nations.

Obadiah:3 *The pride of your heart has deceived you*- It was their apparently awesome human strength which deceived Esau / Edom, according to the parallel in Jer. 49:16. And in Obad. 7 it is the other nations in the confederacy against Israel who deceive Edom. They praised Edom's strength, and Edom's heart was thereby lifted up in pride. The problem with human strength is that it deceives; we thereby play God and become proud.

You who dwell in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high- Pride is consistently given as the reason for the judgment of nations. God is so sensitive to it, and so should we be. The allusion is to how the houses in Petra were carved out of caves in the rock. Edom is recorded as having expelled the Horites from the area where the Edomites settled, and 'Horite' is literally 'a cave dweller'. The consistent message of the prophets is that human strength will not save ultimately, and is in fact an abomination to the God who loves humble trust in Him above all things.

Who says in his heart, 'Who will bring me down to the ground?' - The answer to that was "God" (:4).

Obadiah:4 *Though you mount on high as the eagle*- The parallel Jer. 49:22 says that an eagle greater than them shall take them away from their mountain fortress.

And though your nest is set among the stars, I will bring you down from there, says Yahweh- This is similar language to the condemnation of Babylon in Is. 14, whose heart likewise was exalted to the stars. Edom thought that their physical height and unapproachable fortress in Petra (see on :3) guaranteed their safety. Just as a woman may think her bank balance or a man may consider his pedigree to be an invincible advantage in life. We need to come down from those heights in this life, rather than be brought down from them in the condemnation process. The bringing down of human pride and strength is a major theme of the latter day judgment of the nations around Israel; the word is used multiple times in the prophets (s.w. Ez. 32:30 Hag. 2:22; Zech. 10:11; 11:2 and often) as well as Israel herself (Jer. 13:18 and often). We either come down now, or then. And even the most modestly stationed person in life has some aspect to their lives which is their height of human strength.

Obadiah:5 *If thieves came to you, if robbers by night*- The Lord's second coming will indeed be as a thief in the night (1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Pet. 3:10), both to the world and to the unprepared amongst God's people. Again we see that the final moment of all Bible prophecy is at the Lord's return in the last day, the climax of prophecy.

Oh, what disaster awaits you!- This seems to be Obadiah's interjection, so fully does he personally believe the message he is preaching. Such interjections are common in the prophets. We too should feel the reality of the message of the Kingdom we preach; these things are really so, and shall absolutely come true.

Wouldn't they only steal until they had enough? If grape pickers came to you, wouldn't they leave some gleaned grapes?- The implication of the argument is that a certain degree of theft or grape picking would have been acceptable with God. He recognized that Esau / Edom had a legitimate issue with Jacob, even though of course he should ideally have simply forgiven him. But God perceived that they had gone far beyond that. This is not to say that some degree of vengeance and sin is somehow OK with God, but beyond that invisible line, it is not. But on the other hand, God is used to judging human sin, and He does so with understanding, as the only true judge, taking into account all background factors which led to the sinful behaviour.

Obadiah:6 *How are the men of Esau searched out! How are his hidden things searched through!*- As noted on :2, the past tense is used of events yet future. The picture is of the attackers searching through the hidden things of Edom in search of booty, stripping the bodies of the slain men of Esau. As all the things and men of Jacob were searched (Gen. 31:35 s.w.), and as latter day Jacob must be likewise searched (Zeph. 1:12 s.w.), so Esau must experience what Jacob went through. Perhaps this is why "Esau" is used here rather than "Edom". Despite the strong language of total condemnation, perhaps the idea is that Esau / Edom will come to understand the experiences of his brother Jacob, and eternally reconcile in the Kingdom age. The "hidden things" may refer to the secret sins of Esau (as Jacob's hidden sins are to be searched out, s.w. Hos. 13:12). And those hidden sins were his hatred of his brother. This is the central pivot of the prophecy- that Esau / Edom had hated his brother (:10).

Obadiah:7 *All the men of your alliance have brought you on your way, even to the border-* The idea is as in GNB "Your allies have deceived you; they have driven you from your country". It is hard to discern a major historical fulfilment of this; Edom is to be part of a wider alliance against Jacob / Israel, which then turns upon her and destroys her by deceit. But we can see it coming true in the last days, where so many Bible prophecies suggest that Israel's invaders will destroy themselves, the ten horns will hate the whore. The "alliance" is that of the ten nations around Israel who make a covenant or alliance to destroy her (Ps. 83:5 s.w.). That sounds exactly like the Palestinian Covenant and other such documents which are the founding principles of the jihadist enemies of Israel in our days.

The men who were at peace with you have deceived you, and prevailed against you. Friends who eat your bread lay a snare under you. There is no understanding in him- Eating bread together was a religious act, and "peace" is the characteristic appeal of Islam, a word which can mean both 'submission' and is also related to *salam*, peace; by peace the latter day entity of abuse shall destroy many (Dan. 8:25; 1 Thess. 5:3).

Obadiah:8 *Won't I in that day, says Yahweh, destroy the wise men out of Edom, and understanding out of the mountain of Esau?*- The one time apparent friends of Esau have no understanding (:7) and neither does Esau. Understanding here is presented as the antithesis to pride and human strength. The true understanding is the humility that knows that human strength is nothing and indeed is an abomination to God. As Judah were destroyed (:12 s.w.) so was Edom to be. The destruction of understanding and human wisdom (see the parallel in

Jer. 49:7) happens in "that day". In a moment, men will realize that their entire worldview, what seemed to them wise and sensible and logical, has come crashing down. They were wrong, and it will be too late to learn wisdom. Now is the time to do so.

Obadiah:9 *Your mighty men, Teman, will be dismayed, to the end that everyone may be cut off from the mountain of Esau by slaughter-* The reference may be to the mountain in the sense of the nation, but probably specifically to Petra, their mountain fortress which they considered so invincible (see on :3). The "mighty men" may not simply be warriors; the parallel Jer. 49:22 implies that the heart of those might men will suddenly become like that of a woman hit by labour pains. As noted on :8, the entire worldview and value system of the world will in a sudden moment come crashing down. They will be left only with utter dismay and desperation. "Dismay" is a word often used in the prophets of the result of Divine judgment; the idea is of mental shock and desperation. "Slaughter" is the same word as "violence" in :10- *hamas*, a word often used by jihadism in teaching violence against Israel. What they do and have done to Jacob shall be done to them. We noted on :1 that Edom were never the main aggressors but the ancillaries; yet they are singled out for such judgment because they did this against their brother. The Arabs are Israel's brothers; and this is felt and noted by God and factored in to His final judgment of Arab jihadism against Israel.

Obadiah:10 *For the violence done to your brother Jacob, shame will cover you, and you will be cut off forever-* This verse in terms of structure stands at the centre of the prophecy. This is the fundamental lesson; that Esau hated his brother, even though his brother had sinned against him and God recognized his legitimate feelings of anger (see on :5). And such hatred of our brother leads to eternal condemnation. Eternal "shame" is the language of rejection at the final judgment. "Violence" translates *hamas*, the name of a terror organization currently fighting against Israel; and the use of *hamas* against Jews is one of the dogmas of jihadism. We can see how the latter day fulfilment of these words is already upon us. The *eretz* / land promised to Abraham is to be filled with this *hamas* before the Lord's judgments come as the flood did to destroy all such violent people (s.w. Gen. 6:11,13). The word is also used of the *hamas* done by Hagar against the seed of Abraham (Gen. 16:5).

Obadiah:11 *In the day that you stood on the other side-* As noted on :1, it was Esau's refusal to help Jacob during his time of trouble, both historically and particularly in the last days, which leads to this severe judgment. And so we have another major message from a minor prophet; doing nothing, looking on, is indeed seen as passive aggression by God and judged accordingly. Standing and doing nothing during the various desolations of Jerusalem listed on :1 made Edom "as one of them".

In the day that strangers carried away his substance- This is the same word used in :13 of how Edom carried away Jacob's substance. It could be that the allusions are to the various times when Jerusalem was invaded (see on :1); sometimes Edom just did nothing to help, other times they joined in. Or the idea could be that by passively doing nothing they were indeed "like one of them". This is the serious weight of sins of omission, doing nothing when another is in need. You did not make the homeless person be on the street; but by not responding, you are responsible for their plight. The historical reference would have been to Edom supporting the Philistines when they ransacked Jerusalem and took captives (Am. 1:6,9).

And foreigners entered into his gates, and cast lots for Jerusalem, even you were like one of

them- The writer of Psalm 137, sitting angry and frustrated by a Babylonian riverside, with his guitar hanging on a willow branch, being jeered (“tormented” Ps. 137:3 RVmg.) by the victorious Babylonian soldiers who had led him away captive... he felt *so* angry with them. Especially when they tried to make him sing one of the temple songs (“sing us one of the songs of Zion”). And, as a bitter man does, his mind went from one hurt to another. He remembered how when Babylon had invaded, the Edomites hadn’t helped their Hebrew brethren (Obadiah 11,12). They had egged on the Babylonian soldiers in ripping down the temple, shouting [in a chorus?] “Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation”; see my comment on :1 about the boy who eggs on another boy in a school yard fight. And so in anger and bitterness this Jew prays with tears, as he remembered Zion, “O daughter of Babylon... happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us. Happy shall he be that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the rock” (:8,9 RV). God read those angry words as a prayer, and in some sense they will have their fulfilment, in the judgment not only of Babylon but of Edom in the last days. For these words are picked up in Rev. 18:8,21 and applied to what will finally happen to Babylon. Her spiritual children such as Edom will be dashed against the rock of Christ, the stone of Daniel 2:44, at His return. He will dash in pieces the Babylon-led people that oppose Him.

Obadiah:12 *But don’t look down on your brother in the day of his disaster*- The time of Jacob's trouble has particular reference to the last days (Dan. 12:1; Jer. 30:7). Edom are being urged not to act as they have done historically. And the challenge comes to us to not despise sinners when they are undergoing judgment for their sins, lest we be treated like them. Only by recognizing our own sinfulness will we be saved from doing this.

And don’t rejoice over the children of Judah in the day of their destruction- Rejoicing over the downfall of anyone is sin; for we all deserve to fall and to take the consequence of our sin as they are doing. The fact Esau mocked Jacob as he skulked off to Padan Aram is picked up in Obadiah 12 as a ground for Esau's condemnation; and yet, humanly, Jacob was at that time by far the bigger and more responsible sinner. A bit of mocking from Esau was, from a human standpoint, a mild response. But he is here condemned for such an attitude. The future tense of this verse suggests that in the last days Edom / Esau is to be tempted to again treat Jacob / Israel in the same way as they did during previous invasions of Judah. To break with history and culture is indeed hard, even when that history is wrong and abusive. But this is an appeal for repentance on Edom's part.

Don’t speak proudly in the day of distress- This has particular reference to the latter day time of Jacob's trouble (s.w. "distress"; Jer. 30:7; Dan. 12:1).

Obadiah:13 *Don’t enter into the gate of My people in the day of their calamity*- Again, this has particular reference to the latter day time of Jacob's trouble (s.w. "distress"; Jer. 30:7; Dan. 12:1). The AV renders these verses as rebuke of Esau for having done these things. The ambiguity in the tenses reflects God's awareness that latter day Esau will be tempted to act toward Jacob as they have done historically. And the appeal is to break with the pattern of past behaviour and instead live by grace, motivated by an awareness of our own sin and desert of judgment. Entering into the gate of a person was an idiom used of intercourse, and in this context, of rape. This was what Edom were judged as having done, even though they were the lesser players in the drama, and simply jumping onside with the far larger powers who had invaded Judah. But this is how God saw it.

Don't look down on their affliction in the day of their calamity- For all the major acts of abuse listed here, looking down in pride upon a suffering sinner was especially noteworthy to God. This is just as bad as rape and theft.

Neither seize their wealth on the day of their calamity- Again, "the day" has particular reference to the latter day time of Jacob's trouble (s.w. "distress"; Jer. 30:7; Dan. 12:1). I noted on :11 that standing doing nothing positive to assist may be counted here as if Edom did in fact seize Judah's wealth. But it may also be a simple, plain statement as to what they did.

Obadiah:14 *Don't stand in the crossroads to cut off those of his who escape-* This presumably refers to a particular point on the route southwards to Egypt which ran through Edomite territory. The Jewish refugees were "cut off" by Edom; in line with the second half of the verse, this need not refer to murdering them, but to blocking their route, just as had happened when Israel came up out of Egypt to Canaan. By doing so they were effectively cutting them off in death, because the attackers would therefore catch up with them and slay them. Again and again we see that the collateral damage of apparently lesser actions is weighed carefully by God. And this is the huge takeaway lesson for our lives.

Don't deliver up those of his who remain in the day of distress- It could be that some Jews fled to Edom for safety, throwing themselves upon their brother- but Edom delivered them up to their attackers.

Obadiah:15 *For the day of Yahweh is nearly upon all the nations!-* The proximity of judgment day ought to stand for every generation as a reason for repentance. The preceding verses have been an appeal for Esau to act out of character with his historical pattern; and that is the essence of every human repentance. Edom was to be punished along with "all the nations", a term often used about all the nations around Israel. This never clearly happened historically, but looks ahead therefore to the latter day situation. The Nabatean conquest of Petra from the Edomites doesn't fit Edom perishing along with "all nations".

As you have done, it will be done to you. Your deeds will return upon your own head- I have noted several times already on Obadiah that Esau was to be taught Jacob's experiences; not simply for the sake of a 'measure for measure' punishment, but in order that they would perceive the meaning of what they had done, and repent.

Obadiah:16 *For as you have drunk on My holy mountain-* Drinking is often used in a religious sense. They had blasphemed the temple mount; but the cup of wine they drank there was effectively a drinking of condemnation to themselves.

So will all the nations drink continually. Yes, they will drink, swallow down, and will be as though they had not been- The cup of Divine judgment would cause their eternal death. This is the ultimate condemnation, rather than eternal, conscious torture. Again we note that Edom is to be destroyed at the same time as "all the nations" around Israel. This must have specific reference to the last days, as such a scenario hasn't happened historically. And God's word will always essentially and ultimately come true.

Obadiah:17 *But in Mount Zion, there will be those who escape, and it will be holy-* This

appears to have specific reference to the last days. In the very place where Israel's God is mocked and blasphemed by the conquerors of Zion (:16), there will also be a remnant who escape (Joel 2:32; Is. 59:20). That remnant may refer to a remnant of Edom as well as Israel (Is. 4:2); the referent is purposefully ambiguous, because it is God's plan to save individuals from Edom as well as Israel. Although the temple mount will have been desecrated (:16), it will suddenly be made holy (Joel 3:17). The reference is surely to the literal return of the Lord Jesus to Zion, to save the repentant remnant and judge their abusers.

The house of Jacob will possess their inheritances- "Jerusalem" is literally "possession of peace". The plural "inheritances" may refer to their one great inheritance, as an intensive plural- i.e. Jerusalem and Mount Zion. This area is already a major issue in Jewish-Arab relations, and possessing it is the goal of jihadism.

Obadiah:18 *The house of Jacob will be a fire, the house of Joseph a flame-* As required by the new covenant and the prophecy of the sticks becoming one in Zechariah, the two houses of Israel, Judah and Israel, will unite as one (Jer. 3:18). Entry of the new covenant will make them one who are part of it, as it does now. For disunity between believers is a denial of covenant relationship.

And the house of Esau for stubble- As will all the opposing nations be burnt as stubble at the return of the Lord Jesus (Mal. 4:1).

They will burn among them and consume them. There will not be anyone remaining to the house of Esau. Truly Yahweh has spoken- The judgment upon Edom which we have in Obadiah raises questions regarding Isaac's blessing of Jacob and Esau; for Gen. 27:40 promises that ultimately, Esau would break off the yoke of Jacob and also come to blessing. But this isn't really what the prophecy of Obadiah sounds like. Perhaps Jacob's words were only true of Esau personally and not his seed. Or maybe we are to conclude that Isaac's blessings were nothing more than his ramblings, and were not the Abrahamic blessing. And so all the angst of Jacob and Esau about getting that human blessing was totally misplaced; Isaac's words and blessing had no ultimate power in the long term. And that is true of all the secular blessings we might seek, when the Abrahamic blessing ought to be all we are interested in.

Obadiah:19 *Those of the South will possess the mountain of Esau, and those of the lowland, the Philistines. They will possess the field of Ephraim, and the field of Samaria. Benjamin will possess Gilead-* The "possessions" of :17 within the *eretz* will be finally and eternally possessed by the latter day repentant remnant of Israel. As they were sold into those areas to be abused by the historical Edomites and Philistine / Palestinians (Am. 1:6,9), so they will again; but they will rise up at the Lord's return and possess those areas.

Obadiah:20 *The captives of this army of the children of Israel, who are among the Canaanites, will possess even to Zarephath; and the captives of Jerusalem, who are in Sepharad, will possess the cities of the Negev-* The historical reference is to how when the Philistines [Canaan-dwellers] sacked Jerusalem, they sold the captives of Jerusalem to the Edomites to abuse (Am. 1:6,9). There could have been a restoration and Messianic kingdom even then; but Judah didn't repent, and so the possibility was reapplied and rescheduled to the last days. The captive remnant of Israeli Jews, under abuse by latter day Edom and the Philistines / Palestinians, will repent and possess the *eretz* as God originally intended. Jerome says the name Sepharad in Assyrian means a boundary- i.e., 'the Jews scattered in all

boundaries and regions'.

Obadiah:21 *Saviours will come up on Mount Zion to judge the mountains of Esau, and the kingdom will be Yahweh's*- As the latter day Edomites and others desecrate the temple mount, perhaps by briefly building a physical structure there (:16), the Lord Jesus will return, Yah's salvation, Yehoshua. He and those in Him, the repentant Jewish remnant who now identify with and in Him (:17), will appear there and judge Esau. And the kingdom of Yahweh will be eternally established upon earth, the scene of Is. 24:23.