

THE BOOK OF OBADIAH

Commentary by **A. R. FAUSSETT**

INTRODUCTION

This is the shortest book in the Old Testament. The name means “servant of Jehovah.” Obadiah stands fourth among the minor prophets according to the Hebrew arrangement of the canon, the fifth according to the Greek. Some consider him to be the same as the Obadiah who superintended the restoration of the temple under Josiah, 627 B.C. (^{<1642>}2 Chronicles 34:12). But Obadiah 2:11-16,20 imply that Jerusalem was by this time overthrown by the Chaldeans, and that he refers to the cruelty of Edom towards the Jews on that occasion, which is referred to also in ^{<2102>}Lamentations 4:21,22 ^{<3552>}Ezekiel 25:12-14 35:1-15 ^{<1970>}Psalms 137:7. From comparing Obadiah 2:5 with ^{<3409>}Jeremiah 49:9, Obadiah 2:6 with ^{<3490>}Jeremiah 49:10, Obadiah 2:8 with ^{<3407>}Jeremiah 49:7, it appears that Jeremiah embodied in his prophecies part of Obadiah’s, as he had done in the case of other prophets also (compare ^{<2351>}Isaiah 15:1-16:14 with ^{<3481>}Jeremiah 48:1-47). The reason for the present position of Obadiah before other of the minor prophets anterior in date is: Amos at the close of his prophecies foretells the subjugation of Edom hereafter by the Jews; the arranger of the minor prophets in one volume, therefore, placed Obadiah next, as being a fuller statement, and, as it were, a commentary on the foregoing briefer prophecy of Amos as to Edom [MAURER]. (Compare ^{<3006>}Amos 1:11). The date of Obadiah’s prophecies was probably immediately after the taking of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, 588 B.C. Five years afterwards (583 B.C.) Edom was conquered by Nebuchadnezzar. Jeremiah must have incorporated part of Obadiah’s prophecies with his own immediately after they were uttered, thus stamping his canonicity.

JEROME makes him contemporary with Hosea, Joel, and Amos. It is an argument in favor of this view that Jeremiah would be more likely to insert in his prophecies a portion from a preceding prophet than from a contemporary. If so, the allusion in Obadiah 2:11-14 will be to one of the former captures of Jerusalem: by the Egyptians under Rehoboam (^{<1142>}1

Kings 14:25,26 ^{<4412>}2 Chronicles 12:2, etc.), or that by the Philistines and Arabians in the reign of Joram (^{<4216>}2 Chronicles 21:16,17); or that by Joash, king of Israel, in the reign of Amaziah (^{<4252>}2 Chronicles 25:22,23); or that in the reign of Jehoiakim (^{<1201>}2 Kings 24:1, etc.); or that in the reign of Jehoiachin (^{<1218>}2 Kings 24:8-16). On all occasions the Idumeans were hostile to the Jews; and the terms in which that enmity is characterized are not stronger in Obadiah than in ^{<2189>}Joel 3:19 (compare ^{<3010>}Obadiah 1:10 ^{<3001>}Amos 1:11,12). The probable capture of Jerusalem alluded to by Obadiah is that by Joash and the Israelites in the reign of Amaziah. For as, a little before, in the reign of the same Amaziah, the Jews had treated harshly the Edomites after conquering them in battle (^{<4251>}2 Chronicles 25:11-23), it is probable that the Edomites, in revenge, joined the Israelites in the attack on Jerusalem [JAEGER].

This book may be divided into two parts:

- (1) ^{<3000>}Obadiah 1:1-6 set forth Edom's violence toward his brother Israel in the day of the latter's distress, and his coming destruction with the rest of the foes of Judah;
- (2) ^{<3017>}Obadiah 1:17-21, the coming re-establishment of the Jews in their own possessions, to which shall be added those of the neighboring peoples, and especially those of Edom.

CHAPTER 1

<300>OBADIAH 1:1-21.

DOOM OF EDOM FOR CRUELTY TO JUDAH, EDOM'S BROTHER; RESTORATION OF THE JEWS.

1. **Obadiah** — that is, servant of Jehovah; same as *Abdeel* and *Arabic Abdallah*.

We — I and my people.

heard — (<2210>Isaiah 21:10).

and an ambassador is sent — Yea, an ambassador is *already* sent, namely, an angel, to stir up the Assyrians (and afterwards the Chaldeans) against Edom. The result of the ambassador's message on the heathen is, they simultaneously exclaim, "Arise ye, and let us (with united strength) rise," etc. <4945>Jeremiah 49:14 quotes this.

2. **I have made thee small** — Thy reduction to insignificance is *as sure as if it were already accomplished*; therefore the past tense is used [MAURER]. Edom then extended from Dedan of Arabia to Bozrah in the north (<4908>Jeremiah 49:8,13). CALVIN explains it, "Whereas thou wast made by Me an insignificant people, why art thou so *proud*?" (<3000>Obadiah 1:3)? But if so, why should the heathen peoples be needed to subdue one so insignificant? <4905>Jeremiah 49:15, confirms MAURER'S view.

3. **clefts of ... rock** — (So 2:14 <4885>Jeremiah 48:28). The cities of Edom, and among them Petra (*Hebrew, sela*, meaning "rock," <2402>2 Kings 14:7, *Margin*), the capital, in the Wady Musa, consisted of houses mostly cut in the rocks.

4. **exalt thyself** — or supply from the second clause, "thy nest" [MAURER] (Compare <3106>Job 20:6 <4906>Jeremiah 49:16 <3100>Amos 9:2).

set ... nest among ... stars — namely, on the loftiest hills which seem to reach the very stars. Edom is a type of Antichrist (<2843>Isaiah 14:13 <2080>Daniel 8:10 11:37).

thence will I bring thee down — in spite of thy boast (<3000>Obadiah 1:3), "Who shall bring me down?"

5. The spoliation which thou shalt suffer shall not be such as that which thieves cause, bad as that is, for these when they have seized enough, or all they can get in a hurry, leave the rest — nor such as grape-gatherers cause in a vineyard, for they, when they have gathered most of the grapes, leave gleanings behind — but it shall be utter, so as to leave thee nothing. The exclamation, “How art thou cut off!” bursting in amidst the words of the image, marks strongly excited feeling. The contrast between Edom where no gleanings shall be left, and Israel where at the worst a gleaning is left (²³⁷⁶Isaiah 17:6 24:13), is striking.

6. *How are the things of Esau searched out!* — by hostile soldiers seeking booty. Compare with ³¹⁰⁶Obadiah 1:5,6 here, ²⁴⁰⁹Jeremiah 49:9,10.

hidden things — or “places.” Edom abounded in such hiding-places, as caves, clefts in the rock, etc. None of these would be left unexplored by the foe.

7. *Men of thy confederacy* — that is, thy confederates.

brought thee ... to the border — that is, when Idumean ambassadors shall go to confederate states seeking aid, these latter shall conduct them with due ceremony to their border, giving them empty compliments, but not the aid required [DRUSIUS]. This view agrees with the context, which speaks of false friends *deceiving* Edom: that is, failing to give help in need (compare ⁴⁸⁶⁴Job 6:14,15). CALVIN translates, “have driven,” that is, *shall drive thee*; shall help to drive thee *to thy border* on thy way into captivity in foreign lands.

the men that were at peace with thee — literally, “the men of thy peace.” Compare ¹⁹¹⁰Psalms 41:9 ²³²²Jeremiah 38:22, *Margin*, where also the same formula occurs, “prevailed against thee.”

they that eat thy bread — the poorer tribes of the desert who subsisted on the bounty of Edom. Compare again ¹⁹¹⁰Psalms 41:9, which seems to have been before Obadiah’s mind, as his words were before Jeremiah’s.

have laid a wound under thee — “laid” implies that their intimacy was used as a SNARE *laid* with a view to wound; also, these guest friends of Edom, instead of the cushions ordinarily *laid* under guests at table, *laid* snares to wound, that is, had a secret understanding with Edom’s foe for that purpose. MAURER translates, “a snare.” But *English Version* agrees with the *Hebrew*, which means, literally, “a bandage for a wound.”

none understanding — none of the wisdom for which Edom was famed (see ³¹⁰⁶Obadiah 1:8) to extricate him from his perilous position.

in him — instead of “in thee.” The change implies the alienation of God from Edom: Edom has so estranged himself from God, that He speaks now of him, not to him.

8. (^{<2907>}Isaiah 49:7; compare ^{<1852>}Job 5:12,13 ^{<2908>}Isaiah 19:3 ^{<2909>}Jeremiah 19:7).

in that day ... even destroy — Heretofore Edom, through its intercourse with Babylon and Egypt, and from its means of information through the many caravans passing to and fro between Europe and India, has been famed for knowledge; but in that day *at last* (“even”) I will destroy its wise men.

mount of Esau — that is, Idumea, which was a mountainous region.

9. **cut off by slaughter** — MAURER translates, “on account of the slaughter,” namely, that inflicted on Judea by Edom (compare ^{<3014>}Obadiah 1:14). The *Septuagint*, *Syriac*, and *Vulgate* connect these words with ^{<3010>}Obadiah 1:10, “for the slaughter, for the violence (of which thou art guilty) against thy brother Jacob.” *English Version*, “cut off by slaughter” (that is, an utter cutting off), answers well to “cut off for ever” (^{<3010>}Obadiah 1:10). However, the arrangement of the *Septuagint* gives a better parallelism in ^{<3010>}Obadiah 1:10. “For the slaughter”

- (1) being balanced in just retribution by “thou shalt be *cut off* for ever”
- (2); as “For thy *violence* (not so bad as *slaughter*) against thy brother Jacob”
- (3) is balanced by “*shame* (not so bad as being *cut off*) shall cover thee”
- (4). Shame and extinction shall repay violence and slaughter (^{<1852>}Matthew 26:52 ^{<1830>}Revelation 13:10). Compare as to Edom’s violence, ^{<1907>}Psalms 137:7 ^{<2512>}Ezekiel 25:12 ^{<3010>}Amos 1:11.

10. **against thy brother** — This aggravates the sin of Esau, that it was against him who was his brother by birth and by circumcision. The posterity of Esau followed in the steps of their father’s hatred to Jacob by violence against Jacob’s seed (^{<1271>}Genesis 27:41).

Jacob — not merely his own brother, but his *twin* brother; hence the name *Jacob*, not *Israel*, is here put emphatically. Compare ^{<1620>}Deuteronomy 23:7 for the opposite feeling which Jacob’s seed was commanded to entertain towards Edom’s.

shame ... cover thee — (^{<1852>}Psalms 35:26 69:7).

for ever — (^{<2340>}Isaiah 34:10 ^{<2589>}Ezekiel 35:9 Malachi 1:4). Idumea, *as a nation*, should be “cut off for ever,” though the land should be again inhabited.

11. *thou stoodest on the other side* — in an attitude of hostility, rather than the sympathy which became a brother, feasting thine eyes (see ^{<3012>}Obadiah 1:12) with the misery of Jacob, and eagerly watching for his destruction. So Messiah, the antitype to Jerusalem, abandoned by His kinsmen (^{<1381>}Psalms 38:11).

strangers — the Philistines, Arabians in the reign of Jehoram, etc. (^{<4216>}2 Chronicles 21:16); the Syrians in the reign of Joash of Judah (^{<4042>}2 Chronicles 24:24); the Chaldeans (^{<4402>}2 Chronicles 36:1-23).

carried ... captive his forces — his “host” (^{<3003>}Obadiah 1:20): the multitude of Jerusalem’s inhabitants.

cast lots upon Jerusalem — (^{<2983>}Joel 3:3). So Messiah, Jerusalem’s antitype, had lots cast for His only earthly possessions (^{<4228>}Psalms 22:18).

12. looked on — with malignant pleasure, and a brutal stare. So the antitypes, Messiah’s foes (^{<4227>}Psalms 22:17). MAURER translates, as the *Margin*, “thou shouldst not look” any more. *English Version* agrees with the context better.

the day of thy brother — his day of calamity.

became a stranger — that is, was banished as an alien from his own land. God sends heavy calamities on those who rejoice in the calamities of their enemies (^{<1775>}Proverbs 17:5 24:17,18). Contrast the opposite conduct of David and of the divine Son of David in a like case (^{<4953>}Psalms 35:13-15).

spoken proudly — literally, “made great the mouth”; proudly insulting the fallen (^{<2553>}Ezekiel 35:13, *Margin*; compare ^{<9083>}1 Samuel 2:8 ^{<6330>}Revelation 13:6).

13. substance — translated “forces” in ^{<3011>}Obadiah 1:11.

14. stood in the crossway, to cut off those of his — Judah’s.

that did escape — The Jews naturally fled by the crossways. (MAURER translates, “narrow mountain passes”) well known to them, to escape to the desert, and through Edom to Egypt; but the Edomites stood ready to intercept the fugitives and either kill or “deliver them up” to the foe.

15. For — resumptive in connection with ^{<3010>}Obadiah 1:10, wherein Edom was threatened with *cutting off for ever*.

the day of the Lord — the day in which He will manifest Himself as the Righteous Punisher of the ungodly peoples (^{<2184>}Joel 3:14). The “all” shows that the fulfillment is not exhausted in the punishment inflicted on the surrounding nations by the instrumentality of Nebuchadnezzar; but, as in ^{<2184>}Joel 3:14, and Zechariah 12:3, that the last judgment to come on the nations confederate against Jerusalem is referred to.

as thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee — the righteous principle of retribution in kind (^{<1047>}Leviticus 24:17 ^{<1070>}Matthew 7:2; compare ^{<1006>}Judges 1:6,7 8:19 ^{<1070>}Esther 7:10).

thy reward — the reward of thy deed (compare ^{<2187>}Isaiah 3:9-11).

16. ye ... upon my holy mountain — a periphrasis for, “ye Jews” [MAURER], whom Obadiah now by a sudden apostrophe addresses. The clause, “upon My holy mountain,” expresses the reason of the vengeance to be taken on Judah’s foes; namely, that Jerusalem is God’s holy mountain, the seat of His temple, and Judah His covenant-people. ^{<2492>}Jeremiah 49:12, which is copied from Obadiah, establishes this view (compare ^{<1047>}1 Peter 4:17).

as ye have drunk, etc. — namely, the cup of wrath, being dispossessed of your goods and places as a nation, by Edom and all the heathen; so shall all the heathen (Edom included) drink the same cup (^{<3108>}Psalm 60:3 ^{<2517>}Isaiah 51:17,22 ^{<2432>}Jeremiah 13:12,13 25:15-33 49:12 51:7; ^{<2102>}Lamentations 4:21,22 Na 3:11 ^{<3126>}Habakkuk 2:16).

continually — whereas Judah’s calamity shall be temporary (^{<3107>}Obadiah 1:17). The foes of Judah shall never regain their former position (^{<3108>}Obadiah 1:18,19).

swallow down — so as not to leave anything in the cup of calamity; not merely “drink” (^{<3758>}Psalm 75:8).

be as though they had not been — not a trace left of their national existence (^{<3109>}Job 10:19 ^{<3579>}Psalm 37:36 ^{<2521>}Ezekiel 26:21).

17. upon ... Zion ... deliverance — both in the literal sense and spiritual sense (^{<2102>}Joel 2:32 ^{<2443>}Isaiah 46:13 59:20 ^{<5112>}Romans 11:26). MAURER as the *Margin* explains it, “there shall be a remnant that shall escape.” Compare ^{<2532>}Isaiah 37:32; to the deliverance from Sennacherib there described GROTIUS thinks Obadiah here refers. “Jerusalem shall not be taken, and many of the neighboring peoples also shall find deliverance there.” Unlike Judah’s heathen foes of whom no remnant shall escape (^{<3109>}Obadiah 1:9,16), a remnant of Jews shall escape when the rest of the nation has perished, and shall regain their ancient “possessions.”

there shall be holiness — that is, Zion shall be sacrosanct or inviolable: no more violated by foreign invaders (²³⁰¹Isaiah 42:1 ²¹⁸⁷Joel 3:17).

18. fire — See the same figure, ⁹⁰²⁸Numbers 21:28 ²¹²⁴Isaiah 5:24 10:17.

house of Jacob ... Joseph — that is, the two kingdoms, Judah and Ephraim or Israel [JEROME]. The two shall form one kingdom, their former feuds being laid aside (²⁹¹¹²Isaiah 11:12,13 37:22-28 ²⁰⁸⁸Jeremiah 3:18 ²⁰¹¹Hosea 1:11). The Jews returned with some of the Israelites from Babylon; and, under John Hyrcanus, so subdued and, compelling them to be circumcised, incorporated the Idumeans with themselves that they formed part of the nation [JOSEPHUS, *Antiquities*, 13.17; 12.11]. This was but an earnest of the future union of Israel and Judah in the possession of the enlarged land as one kingdom (²⁵⁷⁶Ezekiel 37:16, etc.).

stubble — (Malachi 4:1).

19. they of the south — The Jews who in the coming time are to occupy the south of Judea shall possess, in addition to their own territory, the adjoining *mountainous region of Edom*.

they of the plain — The Jews who shall occupy the low country along the Mediterranean, south and southwest of Palestine, shall possess, in addition to their own territory, the land of “the Philistines,” which runs as a long strip between the hills and the sea.

and they shall possess the fields of Ephraim — that is, the rightful owners shall be restored, the Ephraimites to the fields of Ephraim.

Benjamin shall possess Gilead — that is, the region east of Jordan, occupied formerly by Reuben, Gad, and half Manasseh. Benjamin shall possess besides its own territory the adjoining territory eastward, while the two and a half tribes shall in the redistribution occupy the adjoining territory of Moab and Ammon.

20. the captivity of this host — that is, the captives of this multitude of Israelites.

shall possess that of the Canaanites — MAURER translates, “the captives ... whom the Canaanites (carried away captive into Phoenicia) even unto Zarephath, shall possess the south,” namely, Idumea as well as the south (²⁰¹⁹Obadiah 1:19). HENDERSON, similarly, “the captives that are among the Canaanites,” etc. But the corresponding clauses of the parallelism are better balanced in *English Version*, “the ten tribes of Israel shall possess the territory of the Canaanites,” namely, Western Palestine and Phoenicia (⁴⁰⁸⁸Judges 3:3). “And the captives of Jerusalem (and Judah) shall possess

the southern cities,” namely, Edom, etc. Each has the region respectively adjoining assigned to it; Israel has the western Canaanite region; Judah, the southern.

even unto Zarephath — near Zidon; called Sarepta in ^{<4045>}Luke 4:26. The name implies it was a place for smelting metals. From this quarter came the “woman of Canaan” (^{<4052>}Matthew 15:21,22). Captives of the Jews had been carried into the coasts of Palestine or Canaan, about Tyre and Zidon (^{<2918>}Joel 3:3,4 Amos 1:9). The Jews when restored shall possess the territory of their ancient oppressors.

in Sepharad — that is, the Bosphorus [JEROME, from his *Hebrew Instructor*]. Sephar, according to others (^{<4009>}Genesis 10:30). Palaeography confirms JEROME. In the cuneiform inscription containing a list of the tribes of Persia [*Niebuhr tab. 31.1*], before Ionia and Greece, and after Cappadocia, comes the name CPaRaD. It was therefore a district of Western Asia Minor, about Lydia, and near the Bosphorus. It is made an appellative by MAURER. “The Jerusalem captives *of the dispersion*” (compare ^{<3003>}James 1:1), wherever they be dispersed, shall return and possess the southern cities. Sepharad, though literally the district near the Bosphorus, represents the Jews’ far and wide dispersion. JEROME says the name in Assyrian means a *boundary*, that is, “the Jews scattered in all boundaries and regions.”

21. saviours — There will be in the kingdom yet to come no king, but a prince; the sabbatic period of the judges will return (compare the phrase so frequent in Judges, only once found in the times of the kings, ^{<4402>}2 Chronicles 14:1, “the land had *rest*”), when there was no visible king, but God reigned in the theocracy. Israelites, not strangers, shall dispense justice to a God-fearing people (^{<2302>}Isaiah 1:26 ^{<3601>}Ezekiel 45:1-25). The judges were not such a burden to the people as the kings proved afterwards (^{<4081>}1 Samuel 8:11-20). In their time the people more readily repented than under the kings (compare ^{<4457>}2 Chronicles 15:17), [ROOS]. Judges were from time to time raised up as *saviours* or *deliverers* of Israel from the enemy. These, and the similar deliverers in the long subsequent age of Antiochus, the Maccabees, who conquered the *Idumeans* (as here foretold, compare II Maccabees 10:15,23), were types of the peaceful period yet to come to Israel.

to judge ... Esau — *to punish* (so “judge,” ^{<4933>}1 Samuel 3:13) ... Edom (compare ^{<3004>}Obadiah 1:1-9,15-19). Edom is the type of Israel’s and God’s last foes (^{<2304>}Isaiah 63:1-4).

kingdom shall be the Lord’s — under Messiah (^{<2044>}Daniel 2:44 7:14,27 Zechariah 14:9 ^{<4033>}Luke 1:33 ^{<6115>}Revelation 11:15 19:6).