

The Vision of Obadiah

Obadiah 1:1-21

Introduction

The story of the day of the Lord, which includes the battle of Armageddon, cannot be fully understood without considering Obadiah and his vision concerning Edom. Every word of his vision awaits the Lord's timing to bring about the end of Jacob's trouble which comes at the end of the seven years of tribulation. To understand the importance of the vision for the future, we must understand the history of two brothers, Jacob and Esau.

Jacob and Esau were the twin sons of Isaac and Rebecca, grandsons of Abraham and Sarah.¹ In the womb, the twins struggle just as they will struggle in life and their descendants will struggle until the completion of the battle of Armageddon in the future.

In the last book of the Old Testament the Lord declares to Malachi, "Jacob, I love, Esau, I hate."² Why would the Lord say such words about Esau? The answer is found in the actions of his offspring through the centuries. Esau's children will include all the Arab nations of today and their faith will focus on an apostate god and a religion called Islam.

Jacob's sons became the twelve tribes of Israel who worshiped the only true God. Their faith follows the Mosaic Law but fails to accept the fulfillment of that Law found in the Messiah. Ultimately, they will turn to Him during the seven years of tribulation.

Obadiah's vision is not unlike those of Isaiah, Daniel, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the rest of the fourteen prophetic books of the Old Testament. A vision is different from a dream. In visions, the Lord or one of His angels will actually appear to the prophet and deliver the message that is to be repeated. In a dream, the prophet sees the scene played out while he is sleeping.

Obadiah's vision is similar to Joel's in that not one word of either book has been fulfilled. Joel's book foretells Israel's heartache during her seven years of tribulation just before Armageddon. Obadiah foretells the destruction of Esau's children just before the Armageddon battle. They will be destroyed because of their ruthless treatment of their Israelite cousins.

Who is Obadiah? We really do not know. Five stories in the Old Testament contain men with this name, but it is impossible to link the first four with the author of this vision. This Obadiah appeared seemingly from the mist to wail this dirge against Edom. Almost as quickly as he arrived, he disappeared into the mist of the crowd. Obadiah is a trumpet that sounds once and then silenced forever. Short, direct and pungent are the words of Obadiah important enough to be recorded in the Holy Writ.

When was this vision written? Once again, because there is no internal evidence in the vision or

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¹ Sarah died before the marriage of Isaac to Rebecca

² Malachi 1:2; Romans 9:13

the rest of the Bible, no conclusive date can be set for its actual transcription.

However, it was included with the fourteen books of the prophets as early as 350 BC, placing it solidly in the Jewish heritage with the other 38 books of the Old Testament.

Edom, which means Esau, is the target of the Lord's wrath in this vision. His descendants' land is called Idumea or Edumea, and it is south of Jerusalem extending into the rough hills and mountains below the Dead Sea. The Edomites refused to allow the Israelites to traverse their land on their way to conquer the Promised Land. As a result, the Lord instructed Joshua to conquer them, scattering the inhabitants all the way to the Mediterranean coast, where they intermarried with the Phoenician people, renamed the Philistines, and ultimately misnamed the Palestinians by one of the Caesars.³

The Report

Obadiah 1:1 The vision of Obadiah. Thus says the Lord GOD concerning Edom— We have heard a report from the Lord, And an envoy has been sent among the nations saying, "Arise and let us go against her for battle"— ² "Behold, I will make you small among the nations; You are greatly despised.

In Obadiah's vision, the Lord reveals that an envoy has been sent throughout the nations of the world to enlist people to fight against Israel. The participants in this envoy are Edomites and it can be safely assumed that they are instigating the call for all nations to join them in their battle against Israel. The other prophets help us understand when this will occur. In John's Revelation it occurs after the sixth bowl is poured upon the earth and three frogs come out of the mouths of the Satanic trio to invite the kings of the whole world to gather with them to war on the great Day of God, in the valley of Armageddon.⁴ Zechariah's prophecy agrees with John's timing, placing the call and gathering of the nations in the valley to the north of Jerusalem just prior to the battle and just before the Lord returns to the Mt. of Olives.⁵

"Thus says the Lord," we find in the first verse and it is directed at Edom, a slither of land twenty miles wide and one hundred miles long. Rugged mountains with red sandstone cliffs reaching as high as five thousand feet make up its landscape. Nestled between the mountains are deep ravines. Plateaus contain ample areas for agriculture if water could be provided.

The people of this nation were enemies of Judah, their cousins. And what was Edom's sin? Pride. Therefore, the vision says of Edom, "Behold, I will make you small among the nations; You are greatly despised." God never ignores pride. It just might be considered the sin of sins.

Since the death of Esau, his descendants, the Edomites, have hated Israel, sought her destruction and her ultimate annihilation. The Edomites of today refuse to honor the Lord's promise of the Promised Land to the nation of Israel. They will support the Arab nations in all efforts to harm Israel. They ignore the Lord and worship their apostate Allah.

³ Julius Caesar

⁴ Revelation 16: 13-16

⁵ Zechariah 14: 1-8

Arrogance Deceived

Obadiah 1:3 "The arrogance of your heart has deceived you, You who live in the clefts of the rock, In the loftiness of your dwelling place, Who say in your heart, 'Who will bring me down to earth?' ⁴ "Though you build high like the eagle, though you set your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down," declares the Lord.

Today, Esau's descendants have surrounded Israel completely. In truth, they infiltrate her streets and occupy her towns while at the same time pronounce the unfairness of the occupation of their region, demanding the expulsion of Israel from the land. Yet, at the same time, they control Mt. Moriah, the holy temple mount, which they have capped with their gold domed mosque.

The Edomites are brazenly arrogant and will continue to be so because of their accomplishments recorded in this passage. Their success will be so great that they will be self-deceived to the point of thinking they are too great and affluent to fail as a nation. At one time they had carved their cities into the sides of the mountains, but deserted them. To fulfill prophecy, they will return to the barren clefts of the rocks in Petra, reestablishing it and the city of Teman as well as the mountain range of Paran.

Obadiah says, "The arrogance of your heart has deceived you." One reason was the trade route that crossed Edom's territory. It was the safe route from Egypt to Syria. Solomon and other southern kings warred with Edom about this route. The Edomite tax to pass through their land was severe. It made Edom rich and proud.

How could this be? The Edomites lived high on the mountains. Obadiah says, "You who live in the clefts of the rock, in the loftiness of your dwelling place." There in their city of Petra, discovered in 1812 by a Swiss explorer, a treasury was carved in the rock of the mountain to hold the riches obtained from the traversing caravans. There, the Edomites could sit in wait for travelers and descend on them to tax them heavily.

"Though you build high like the eagle, though you set your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down," declares the Lord. Edom will have nowhere to hide. Even though some of them will be making their homes in the towers of the mountain dwellings and eventually in space among the stars, there will be no place high enough or far enough away for them to escape the LORD's judgment on them on His Day at Armageddon.

Utter Ruin

Obadiah 1:5 "If thieves came to you, if robbers by night— O how you will be ruined! — Would they not steal only until they had enough? If grape gatherers came to you, would they not leave some gleanings? ⁶ "O how Esau will be ransacked, and his hidden treasures searched out! ⁷ "All the men allied with you Will send you forth to the border, And the men at peace with you Will deceive you and overpower you. They who eat your bread Will set an ambush for you. (There is no understanding in him.) ⁸ "Will I not on that day," declares the Lord, "Destroy wise men from Edom and understanding from the mountain of Esau? ⁹ "Then your mighty men will be dismayed, O Teman, so that everyone may be cut off from

the mountain of Esau by slaughter.

The Lord describes utter ruin that will overtake the Edomites in several ways. It will not be like thieves in the night because thieves take only what they want or need; they never take everything. Neither will it be like the grape gatherers who always leave a little behind for the poor to gather. They will be utterly destroyed and everything they have will be taken from them.

Moreover, Edom's so-called friends and allies will aid in the deception by convincing them to accept a place of duty at the border of southern Israel and their reestablished land south of the Dead Sea, the land of Edom. When they leave their homes in Palestine, their friends will sack their cities, stealing the supplies for their own use.

The Edomites were middlemen between the Arabs and the Phoenicians. Holding a sword over the harbors of the gulf of Aqaba, the masters of Edom levied tribute on the Tarshish ships bearing the gold of Ophir. Sitting astride the roads that ran from Damascus to Memphis, Edom's customs agents halted merchant caravans from Arabia, Persia, the distant East, Egypt, Tyre, and far-off Greece. Either the traders paid taxes or forfeited everything. Thus, the Edomites filled their caves with the wealth of both East and West.

Now it was Edom's turn to pay. All its treasures were to be plundered—and not by any ordinary robber band. If common thieves had penetrated Edom's rocky halls some dark night and stolen all they could carry away, much wealth would still have remained. "If thieves came to you, If robbers by night-- O how you will be ruined! Would they not steal *only* until they had enough? If grape gatherers came to you, would they not leave *some* gleanings?" But the greed of the coming conqueror would be insatiable.

The Edomites had crossed the hidden boundary between God's merciful patience and His wrath. They had gone too far, indulging their anti-Semitism once too often. The enemy would harvest their accumulated riches and not leave even the leanest pickings. "O how Esau will be ransacked, and his hidden treasures searched out!"

Then, when the Lord arrives, He will destroy all of the Edomites before He approaches Jerusalem to melt away all who stand in the valley of Armageddon.⁶ All the Edomites will be slaughtered that day before the battle begins.⁷

The worst kind of treachery in the East is to betray a man whose bread one has eaten. Likewise, a nation's destruction is always more bitter when former allies and confederates participate in it.

Through the years Edom had persecuted his brother Jacob, with whom he should have had friendly, peaceful relations. Now Edom's unbrotherly, unnatural hatred was to be returned to him. His friends and allies (probably Moab, Ammon, Tyre, and Sidon; see Jeremiah 27:3; Zephaniah 2:8; Ezekiel 25) with whom he had united to fend off Babylon and to persuade Zedekiah to rebel, would turn against Edom. "All the men allied with you," Obadiah prophesied, "Will send you forth to the border, And the men at peace with you Will deceive you and overpower you. *They who eat your bread Will set an ambush for you.*" Edom's treaties would prove to be worthless. The

⁶ Habakkuk 3:3

⁷ Joel 3:19

countries on which Edom thought he could rely would make peace with the invader.

Edom failed to recognize that his hostility toward the Jews was hostility toward God and that his anti-Semitic policies had sowed the seeds of his destruction. "There is no understanding in him," cried Obadiah. That was God's assessment of the situation.

Let the Arab and Muslim nations that surround Israel today beware. These sons of Ishmael stand in Edom's shoes and are robed with Edom's mantle. Although they are blood kin, they hate the Jews with a passion equaled only by that of Edom of old. These antisemitic nations make alliances with one another, make common cause with Russia, and will even side with the antichrist against Israel. They do not understand that their bitter hatred of the Jews will bring them to grief.

"Will I not on that day," declares the LORD, "Destroy wise men from Edom and understanding from the mountain of Esau?"

The deepest springs of the Edomites' hatred of the Jews were in their blood. Although Esau and Jacob were twins, they were opposites, as were the two peoples descended from them. The Jews were God's chosen people. They knew the true and living God. The Edomites, like Esau, were essentially irreligious and thoroughly profane. Rarely, if ever, do we read of Edom's gods in the Old Testament. Doubtless the Edomites had some gods, but religion was not their big preoccupation. Like Esau, they had no spiritual birthright, no faith in the future. They were dead to the unseen world and lived for power and plunder in this one.

In keeping with their free-thinking, the Edomites gained a reputation for shrewdness and worldly wisdom. Eliphaz, chief of Job's friends and representative of worldly wisdom, was a Temanite (Job 4:1). The Herods—unprincipled statesmen known for cleverness, scheming, and lack of ideals—were Edomites. "That fox" was Jesus' estimate of Herod Antipas (Luke 13:32). The Edomites' shrewdness would do them little good. The wise men of Edom were destined for the sword.

Today's Russians with their carnal wisdom and political shrewdness are the spiritual heirs of the Edomites. Comparing American naivete with Russian craftiness, someone said, "The Americans play checkers; the Russians play chess." But their craftiness will not help them in the end. Their materialism, hatred of God, and rabid anti-Semitism will bring them to the same doom that Edom experienced (Ezekiel 38-39).

"Then your mighty men will be dismayed, O Teman, in order that everyone may be cut off from the mountain of Esau by slaughter." Thus Obadiah prophesied and, sure enough, along came the Babylonians. The rocky ramparts of Edom yielded to the military prowess of Nebuchadnezzar, the man to whom God symbolically gave the world (Daniel 2). Later, under John Hyrcanus of the Maccabean dynasty, Edom was further reduced. Under the Romans, the Edomites lost their national character altogether. Gone was Edom's boasted might. Gone were Edom's soldiers.

Neither sages nor soldiers could save Edom when God decreed that its domains would become a slaughterhouse. Obadiah could see it all: the marching troops of Babylon, the traitors within the gates of Edom, the people trapped at the end of their ravines, the plunder and slaughter. The prophet saw it, he told it, and so it was.

Why Edom

Obadiah 1:10 "Because of violence to your brother Jacob, you will be covered with shame, and you will be cut off forever. ¹¹ "On the day that you stood aloof, On the day that strangers carried off his wealth, and foreigners entered his gate and cast lots for Jerusalem— You too were as one of them. ¹² "Do not gloat over your brother's day, The day of his misfortune. And do not rejoice over the sons of Judah in the day of their destruction; Yes, do not boast in the day of their distress. ¹³ "Do not enter the gate of My people in the day of their disaster. Yes, you, do not gloat over their calamity in the day of their disaster. And do not loot their wealth in the day of their disaster. ¹⁴ "Do not stand at the fork of the road to cut down their fugitives; and do not imprison their survivors in the day of their distress.

The Edomites will be destroyed because they will have done everything possible to hurt their Israelite cousins during their time of tribulation and trouble. The Edomites will do nothing to protect Israel or her property, almost acting like border guards while others plunder Israel's assets. They will be part of the siege on Jerusalem when half of the people in the city are cut off or die.⁸ They will be thrilled to see Israel's travail. When the Jews begin to run, the Edomites will block their exits from the cities, capturing them as fugitives and returning them for rewards. The Lord warns them not to do these things, but they will, and He will destroy them.

Edom had committed three unpardonable sins: encouraging Judah's foes, enjoying Judah's fall, and enslaving Judah's fugitives. Because of these sins, retribution was soon to be meted out.

Obadiah said to Edom, "Because of violence to your brother Jacob, you will be covered *with* shame, and you will be cut off forever." It is true that God's ancient people, like His people today, had many faults and sins and deserved chastisement. But they were still God's people and it was not Edom's place to urge on Judah's foes or actively side with the enemies of those who were dear to His heart. Whatever knowledge of God, salvation, true holiness, justice, mercy, and truth was to be found in the world, was deposited with God's people.

Terrible is the state of the souls of those who rejoice to see God's people—however erring and backslidden they might be—attacked and harmed by their foes. Whose side are they on?

Edom was on the wrong side. "On the day that you stood aloof," added Obadiah, " On the day that strangers carried off his wealth, and foreigners entered his gate and cast lots for Jerusalem-- You too were as one of them."

Consider what happened. It was the darkest hour in Hebrew history. The situation had been bad enough a century earlier when the Assyrians had carried the northern tribes into captivity and ravished Judah right down to the wall of Jerusalem. But now Jerusalem and the temple lay in ruins.

The northern tribes had never truly represented God's truth. They had worshiped the golden calf, and all their kings had been evil. So, the northern kingdom had come to an end, while the preaching of Isaiah and the prayers of godly King Hezekiah had saved Jerusalem and the temple from the Assyrians. But now it looked as though "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God"

⁸ Zechariah 14:2

(2 Corinthians 4:6) had gone out forever. It hadn't, of course. There was still a Jeremiah, an Ezekiel, and a Daniel.

The Edomites, who had encouraged Judah's foes, revealed the state of their souls by rejoicing when the light of God on this earth was seemingly extinguished. They remind us that there are people who love darkness. There were people who rejoiced in the death of Christ and even mocked Him as He died. And today there are people who rejoice in the downfall of the church and in the disgrace of her ministers.

When the Chaldeans invaded Judah, "cast lots upon Jerusalem," carried off the spoil, and enslaved her people, Edom applauded and helped the conquerors. Obadiah was not the only prophet to react to this unbrotherly sin: see Psalm 137:7; 83:4-6; Ezekiel 35; Jeremiah 49:7-22; Isaiah 34; 63. The book of Obadiah is a divine commentary on Proverbs 17:5: "He that is glad at calamities shall not be unpunished."

Edom found both pleasure and profit in Judah's fall, and Obadiah's denunciation rang out again and again: "Thou shouldest not have..."

Here, incidentally, we come to the crux of the question, was Obadiah speaking of the prophetic past or the real past? Scholars who believe that he was speaking of the prophetic past usually rephrase the words "Thou shouldest not have" as "Do not," "Look not," or "Gloat not." According to this view the words are a warning, not a woe; Obadiah was telling Edom not to gloat. However, even if strict translation calls for this rephrasing, Obadiah did not necessarily live long before the event. He could have been a contemporary and still have warned Edom not to play the wretched part it did. Or, if we stay with the King James text, he could have witnessed the sin of Edom (either actually or in a vision) and denounced it.

Note the things that Edom had done (or would do):

Do not gloat over your brother's day, The day of his misfortune. And do not rejoice over the sons of Judah in the day of their destruction; Yes, do not boast in the day of *their* distress.

"Do not enter the gate of My people in the day of their disaster. Yes, you, do not gloat over their calamity in the day of their disaster. And do not loot their wealth in the day of their disaster.

We can picture the Edomites swarming down from their cliff homes when the tidings came that Nebuchadnezzar's army had breached the wall of Jerusalem and receiving the news with rousing cheers. We can hear the canyons echoing shouts of glee and the caves reverberating boastful words. "That will teach those despicable Jews a lesson," someone would have called out. Raising the flag of Edom in triumph, someone else would have cried, "Three cheers for Edom!" as if the Edomites had done the deed. "Come on, Edom!" another probably shouted. "What are we waiting for? Let's get in on the action. This is the day we've been hoping for."

Out of their rocky ravines the Edomites came—wild, fierce, exultant. Soon they were cheering the Babylonians, gloating over the captives, pouring into Jerusalem, and plundering the spoils. Their sin was unpardonable.

God had given Israel special instructions regarding Edom: "Thou shalt not abhor an Edomite; for he is thy brother.... The children that are begotten of them shall enter into the congregation of the Lord in their third generation" (Deuteronomy 23:7-8). God expected the Hebrews to extend the olive branch to Edom, to evangelize the descendants of Esau and win them to Him. The Hebrews never did, so they reaped the fruit of their failure. But their failure did not excuse Edom's behavior.

From the beginning Edom had hated the Hebrews and been jealous of them. That seed of hate had germinated and borne its bitter fruit of malice and revenge. The Edomites had progressed from indifference to Judah's fate, to active participation in the persecution of God's people, to rejoicing in their downfall.

Some professing Christians are like the Edomites. Instead of helping a brother when he falls, they delight in digging out the details and spreading the news. Feeling smug, they do not hesitate to add an extra kick or two to a man who is down. Obadiah warned against such wicked behavior.

In verse 14 we read of Edom's final damning sin, the last malicious kick delivered to a fallen brother: "And do not stand at the fork of the road To cut down their fugitives; And do not imprison their survivors In the day of their distress."

We can picture a frantic mother who has somehow survived the horrors of the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem. Her husband is dead. She and her two small children have miraculously eluded the ravaging troops who are sacking the city and performing all the acts of horror expected of an invader. Through an unguarded hole in the wall, the three escape the city. *Maybe if we can get to the mountain pass, we will be safe*, the mother thinks, and she urges her children to be brave, to hurry, to run for their lives. Believing there will be some safety in numbers, she joins other desperate fugitives.

At last they reach the pass. The noise of the battle and the screams of the wretched people trapped in the city grow fainter and a prayer of thankfulness rises in the mother's heart. Hope revives—and then armed warriors, roaring with ill-begotten mirth, spring from ambush. Quickly they round up the fugitives and shackle young and old, women and children. The warriors are not Babylonians; they are Edomites! "Back you go," they mock. "We're handing you over to the Babylonians." The fugitives plead for mercy, but they might as well try to convince a tiger to give up its prey.

Day of the Lord

Obadiah 1:15 "For the day of the Lord draws near on all the nations. As you have done, it will be done to you. Your dealings will return on your own head. ¹⁶ "Because just as you drank on My holy mountain, All the nations will drink continually. They will drink and swallow and become as if they had never existed.

When the day of the Lord finally arrives, the fate of Edom is set. By that time, she will have used and abused Mt. Moriah for her own purposes for hundreds of years. The dome of the rock mosque was built in 1193 AD by Islam on the holy mount and it will not be removed until the Lord destroys it on His day. Because Edom and its allies have used the mount for Islam's false religion,

they all will be destroyed. It will be as if they never existed. They will rot where they stand on that day.⁹

Having finished his indictment against Edom, Obadiah was about to pass sentence. At this point his prophecy was enlarged to embrace not only Edom, but also all the other countries that consider themselves to be enemies of the Jewish people. Obadiah's vision carried him over the centuries to "the day of the Lord" to the end-time fulfillment of many Old and New Testament prophecies. From God's point of view, that day was near.

Like so many prophecies, Obadiah's words would have a partial fulfillment for Edom and a later, postponed fulfillment for the end-time foes of Israel. The retribution pronounced on Edom follows the principle of all divine retribution: "As you have done, it will be done to you. Your dealings will return on your own head." Sin is like a boomerang. What we do to others often comes back and is done to us. Obadiah's prophecy has its ultimate focus in "the day of the Lord," when all nations, including a latter-day Edom, will come up against the nation of Israel. Ancient hostilities will be back on center stage.

The rebirth of the state of Israel in our day heralds the approaching fulfillment of Obadiah's end-time prophecy. The ancient arena is fast becoming the modern arena. The old land of Edom is now part of the Arab country of Jordan, which joins with other Arab and Muslim nations in their hostility toward Israel. Jordan was created by the British government about the same time Britain was making plans to implement the Balfour declaration and the League of Nations' mandate. Hatred of Israel will cause embittered Arab nations to ally themselves with Russia, the beast, or anyone else who might make their dream of eradicating Israel and exterminating the Jews a reality.

God will, however, that justice is done. The Middle Eastern Arab nations that are so vehement and unrelenting in their anti-Semitism will reap what they have sown: "As thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee." God's justice is poetic. The punishment corresponds with the offense, just as one line of a poem corresponds to another.

Historically, Edom's doom, although slow, was sure. Jeremiah foretold that Edom would be subject to Nebuchadnezzar (27:2-6), and after their captivity ended, Malachi bore witness to the fact that Edom had been made utterly desolate (1:2-3). Nebuchadnezzar no doubt conquered Edom when he marched against Egypt. He could not afford to leave behind him such a strong fortress of robber barons. He needed secure passage for men and materials, and the unsubdued Edomites sat astride his supply lines. It was the same passage that Edom had so spitefully denied to Israel centuries earlier when the Hebrews were marching from Egypt to Canaan. Moreover, Nebuchadnezzar needed safe passage between the Dead Sea and the gulf of Aqaba. We can be sure that Nebuchadnezzar treated Edom the way he treated all conquered countries—with plunder, death, and captivity.

God's justice, however, is ever tempered with mercy. His judgments often are slow in coming, allowing time for repentance. Edom must have recovered at least some of its power during the years of Judah's exile because the repatriated Jews found Edomites plundering the Negeb in the

⁹ Zechariah 14:12

south and ravaging as far north as Hebron. Malachi 1:4 records Esau's boast, "We will return and build the desolate places," and foretells further desolation.

Probably during the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes, who viciously persecuted the Jews, the Edomites took possession of the southern part of Judah and Hebron, which was just twenty-two miles from Jerusalem. Judah Maccabeus battled the Edomites at Arra-batene in Idumea and twenty years later Simon Maccabeus was still fighting them. Twenty years after that, Simon's son John Hyrcanus had to fight them again; he thoroughly thrashed them and forced them to accept circumcision, become Jewish proselytes, and accept Jewish law.

The Edomites' character, however, remained unchanged and Judah could not get rid of them that easily. In time, Judah had to deal with the Herods, subservience to Rome, and insatiable cruelty. During the terrible siege of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, the Zealots made the fatal mistake of sending for the Edomites. The city was infiltrated by some twenty thousand Edomites who only added further torment to the death pangs of Jerusalem. Then their names disappeared from history. Most of them perished during the dreadful extermination that accompanied the siege and sack of Jerusalem.

For Israel's end-time enemies, victory will be followed by revelry (Obadiah 16). The prophet could see, in a vision, the victorious armies of the beast sweeping through Jerusalem, desecrating synagogues and shrines, plundering the already defiled temple, and toasting their successes in drunken orgies on the temple mount.

The beast will be the last of a long train of conquerors who have desecrated the holy city, "the city of the great King." Obadiah could see Edomites, Babylonians, Macedonians, and Romans in successive waves seizing Jerusalem and celebrating by drinking to the triumph of their gods over the God of Heaven.

But the victory of the heathen is temporary. Wine for wine! is the promise of verse 16. God has always triumphed in the end and the beast's doom is sure. Even as Jerusalem falls into his hands, the heavens will rend open and the rightful King will return.

Israel Exalted

Obadiah 1:17 "But on Mount Zion there will be those who escape, and it will be holy. And the house of Jacob will possess their possessions. ¹⁸ "Then the house of Jacob will be a fire and the house of Joseph a flame; But the house of Esau will be as stubble. And they will set them on fire and consume them, So that there will be no survivor of the house of Esau," For the Lord has spoken.

When the Lord utterly destroys Edom, its allies and dealings on Mt. Moriah, the Israelites will be safe on Mt. Zion. After the destruction of Armageddon, the houses of Jacob and Joseph will emerge to repossess all the Promised Land taken from them in 722 BC and 606 BC. Esau's descendants, her bitter enemies and cousins will no longer exist; there will not be one survivor.

Notice the first word of verse 17: "But." Mark well the *buts* of the Bible. They are hinges on which great events and doctrines turn. " But on Mount Zion," Obadiah prophesied, " there will be

those who escape, and it will be holy. And the house of Jacob will possess their possessions." Edom could anticipate annihilation, but Zion could look forward to restoration. Zion, a poetic name for Jerusalem, was actually the stronghold of the city. In its millennial context, Zion symbolizes the imperial power and universal rule of Christ that will be centered at Jerusalem.

Obadiah saw the Hebrew nation resettled in the promised land. Their shifting of time over forever, the Jewish people will fully possess the vast territory (from the Nile to the Euphrates) deeded by God to Abraham. Holiness, the one thing no one can possess apart from Christ and His indwelling Holy Spirit, will be established throughout the realm. The statutes of the sermon on the mount will become the common law of Israel and the world.

As we have seen, Israel's ancient enemies will rise again. Today the Arabs hold the lands that once belonged to Edom, Moab, Ammon, Philistia, and Phoenicia. Syria and Egypt are again powers in the Middle East. Iraq (ancient Babylon) and Iran (ancient Persia) are also Middle Eastern powers; both harbor deep hostility toward Israel.

In Obadiah's vision a united Jewish nation was back in its land. The divided kingdom was a thing of the past. The prophet saw the former territory of Edom raising its head against Israel. The nations in that territory will continue to oppose Israel, support Israel's enemies, and foment terrorism and war against Israel. In the end, however, they will lose everything. The Jews will be God's chosen instrument to punish them. Just as stubble burns in a fire, no remnant of Edom will survive. " Then the house of Jacob will be a fire and the house of Joseph a flame; But the house of Esau *will be* as stubble."

Edom's Land Divided

Obadiah 1:19 Then those of the Negev will possess the mountain of Esau, and those of the Shephelah the Philistine plain; also, possess the territory of Ephraim and the territory of Samaria, and Benjamin will possess Gilead. ²⁰ And the exiles of this host of the sons of Israel, who are among the Canaanites as far as Zarephath, And the exiles of Jerusalem who are in Sepharad Will possess the cities of the Negev.

The Jews who have put their faith in the Lord will survive the time of tribulation and the wrath of His coming. Those of the south country, the tribes of Judah and Simeon, will inhabit Edom's mountains and plains. The Jews of the foothills of Israel will settle in the Gaza strip and the Philistine plain area as well as Ephraim's territory that was taken away in 722 BC and renamed Samaria by the Assyrians after they captured the Northern Kingdom.¹⁰ Benjamin's tribe will take Gilead, located east of the Jordan in the old territory of Gad and the rest of the surviving Israelites from Jerusalem will dwell in the cities once owned by the Edomites.

Yes! Obadiah saw the restored Hebrew nation possessing the territory of her former foes. Not even during the great days of David and Solomon did Israel possess more than a tithe of the total land grant that was hers under the Abrahamic covenant. But she will. Israelites living in the

¹⁰ Samaria was formed by the Assyrians who took over the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 722 BC. Assyria removed most of the Jews from the country leaving only the poorest people behind. Assyrians were moved to that land to intermarry with the Jews resulting in a half-breed culture.

southern part of the land will take possession of mount Esau. Those dwelling in the lowlands toward the sea will take what was once the land of the Philistines. The coastland and the heartland will be securely Israel's. Obadiah foresaw it all.

During the terrible persecutions of the beast at the time of the great tribulation, many Jews will be rounded up, herded into concentration camps, and slated for death—as they were during the dark days of the Nazis. But the returning Christ will liberate them and install them at Zarephath, a town between Tyre and Sidon. Thus, modern Lebanon will become part of Israel's territory. At present, Lebanon is often used as a staging place for Palestinian terrorists and as an outpost of Syria.

Scholars have made various conjectures concerning the location of Sepharad. Some think the name refers to Spain or Sardis, where the ancient Phoenicians sold their Hebrew slaves. Perhaps the beast will establish concentration camps in various places in Europe, and the liberated Jews from these death camps will head for the Promised Land like homing pigeons, just as the survivors of the Nazi holocaust did. They will settle, Obadiah said, in "the cities of the south"—in triumph over Edom.

The Kingdom

Obadiah 1:21 The deliverers will ascend Mount Zion to judge the mountain of Esau, and the kingdom will be the Lord's.

The deliverers of Israel will ascend to Mt. Zion after they descend from heaven. They include the Lord and all the host of saints from all the ages who return with Him when He breaks through the eastern skies and destroys the Edomites from their mountains and cities to their borders on the way to the Battle of Armageddon.¹¹

The Lord's foot will touch the Mt. of Olives which will split from east to west. A plain will be formed that will rise above all the other natural structures of the world. Every mountain will be laid low. What began at noon will be completed in fewer than six hours. By 6:00 PM on the day of the Lord, it is all over. Over the next 45 days, the new temple will be built in Jerusalem and the great white throne will be placed there for the King of the kingdom.¹² The world will belong to the Lord completely for 1,000 years at that time.

"The deliverers will ascend Mount Zion to judge the mountain of Esau, And the kingdom will be the LORD'S." Mount Zion will become the center of all governmental control in Jesus' millennial kingdom. "Deliverers," or judges, will be in constant communication with this power center and will exercise Christ's authority over the most distant outposts of His world empire, including mount Esau itself. Never again will Edom actually or representatively threaten the Jewish people or anyone else.

" And the kingdom will be the LORD'S." With these words Obadiah's prophecy ended. There was no more to be said, for Christ is the King "against whom there is no rising up" (Proverbs 30:31). Obadiah turned our eyes toward Jesus and then put down his quill.

¹¹ Matthew 24:29-31; Revelation 19:11-16; Habakkuk 3:3-13, Joel 2:1-11; Zechariah 12:2-10; Zechariah 14:1-21; Zechariah 13:2-9; Revelation

¹² Amos 8:9; Habakkuk 3:11; Zechariah 14:7; Daniel 12:10-12; Revelation 20:1-11