

All About Edom (Part Five): Obadiah And God's Judgment

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If repetition is the best form of emphasis, God goes overboard in the chapter-long, prophetic book of Obadiah. Between Obadiah 11 and 14, a total of four verses, the phrase "in the day" or "on the day" occurs ten times. It acts as a kind of refrain in the prophet's song of lamentation over the nation of Edom. It repetitiously reminds the reader or listener of a specific time when the Edomites' iniquity came to a head, sealing their fate.

It is also a prophetic clue. The phrase functions like a series of huge billboards, each one illuminated by glaring spotlights, but rather than displaying successive lines of a ditty, like the old Burma Shave signs, these all repeat the same phrase: "in the day"! In these verses, God is essentially shouting at us as through a loudspeaker, "This occurs 'in the day'! 'In the day' is when this happens!"

Earlier, in Obadiah 8, God had introduced the time setting with the phrase "in that day." He refers to the time when Edom's allies betray the descendants of Esau and lay a cunning snare for them, one they fail to perceive until far too late. God informs them through the prophecy that He had had a hand in destroying Edom's wise men, who, had they been present, may have been able to discern the trap before it had been sprung.

However, the timing in verse 8 is vague, having little supporting detail to fix it in history. Subsequent verses reiterate the fact that God has one particular time in mind, to which He adds detail, alerting us to the fact that this day is not Edom's day, but his brother Jacob's day (Obadiah 12). In addition, it is a time of distress, calamity, captivity, and destruction.

In verse 15, though, God tells us plainly, "For the day of the Lord upon all the nations is near." He has in mind a particular period of His great plan, a time when the various threads of human history, religion, culture, and thought terminate in confusion and rebellion against God, and He Himself takes center-stage to resolve the Satanic mess. Though the Edomites have gloated over Israel's misfortune on other days in the past, it will recur most egregiously in this time of the end, causing God to decree, "As you have done, it shall be done to you. . . . No survivor shall remain of the house of Esau" (Obadiah 15, 18).

A Day of Calamity

Obadiah 10 had named the Edomites' great sin: "violence against your brother Jacob." The four subsequent verses tick off a number of illustrations of the Edomites' violence toward Israel, providing an expanded description of their transgression. Obadiah writes:

In the day that you stood on the other side—in the day that strangers carried captive his forces, when foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem—even you were as one of them. But you should not have gazed on the day of your brother, in the day of his captivity; nor should you have rejoiced over the children of Judah in the day of their destruction; nor should you have spoken proudly in the day of distress. You should not have entered the gate of My people in the day of their calamity. Indeed, you should not have gazed on their affliction in the day of their calamity, nor laid hands on their

substance in the day of their calamity. You should not have stood at the crossroads to cut off those among them who escaped; nor should you have delivered up those among them who remained in the day of distress. (Obadiah 11-14)

The prophet's first example, the only one requiring explanation, is that they "stood on the other side." This Hebraism indicates they "stood aloof," a description of their haughtiness. God is emphasizing their attitude here. Literally, the phrase reads, "stood from in front of them," a roundabout way of saying that the Edomites considered themselves too good to stand *with* them. In other words, because of their pride, they stood off to the side or in front of them, effectively separating themselves from their brother.

Their action reflected their hearts, saying, in effect, "Do not confuse us with them!" It indicates an attitude of great superiority, of haughty pride and separation. Thus, instead of standing with Israel in her defense, they stood aside and let the enemy do what it would. Edom did not behave as a brother nation should have. Even had the Edomites not been directly engaged in the hostilities against Israel, this act alone reveals that their loyalties were solidly with Israel's enemy.

The New King James Version poorly translates verses 12-14, rendering them in the past tense, when the Hebrew text relates this story in the future tense. The difference in tense transforms a castigating historical narrative into a more appropriate and stern warning against future activity:

But do not gloat over the day of your brother in the day of his misfortune; do not rejoice over the people of Judah in the day of their ruin; do not boast in the day of distress. Do not enter the gate of My people in the day of their calamity; do not gloat over his disaster in the day of his calamity; do not loot his wealth in the day of his calamity. Do not stand at the crossroads to cut off his fugitives; do not hand over his survivors in the day of distress. (English Standard Version)

Specifically, what is the day of Israel's calamity? Jeremiah 30:5-7 provides the answer:

For thus says the Lord: "We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace. Ask now, and see, whether a man is ever in labor with child? So why do I see every man with his hands on his loins like a woman in labor, and all faces turned pale? Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it; and it is the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it."

Jesus also spoke about this distressing day in His Olivet Prophecy:

For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened. (Matthew 24: 21-22)

"The time of Jacob's trouble," more commonly known as "the Great Tribulation," is a period of intense hardship and war for the people of Israel. It is generally thought that it will last three and a half years (Daniel 7:25; 12:7; Revelation 11:2; 12:14; 13:5), until Jesus Christ returns in power to defeat the Beast and his armies and to rule all nations (Revelation 19:11-21). According to Jesus' description, it is a time of global holocaust; if God did not intervene, all life on earth would cease!

The warnings in Obadiah 12-14 are directed toward the Edomites alive when that day arrives, perhaps not very long from now. We may have seen a precursor of the fulfillment of this prophecy, when, on and after September 11, 2001, television news programs broadcast images of Palestinians gloating and dancing in the streets in the West Bank, giving out candy, and shrieking in giddy celebration. Such a scene is likely to happen again when the Great Tribulation fully comes upon the nations of Israel.

At that time, the people of Edom may not have a great deal of power over the nations of Israel, and the prophecies do not indicate that they will. Today, their strength is limited to suicidal terrorist attacks, but they still have the ability to mock, to pillage, and to take advantage of any sign of weakness. God says in Obadiah 6-9 that He will remove their wealth, their wisdom, and their courage, but they will still be able to gloat when they see Israel fall.

A Day of Wrath

The theme of the next section, Obadiah 15-16 appears in Jeremiah 25:28: "And it shall be, if they refuse to take the cup from your hand to drink, then you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts: "You shall certainly drink!"' Edom, God proclaims, shall certainly drink of the wine of His wrath.

Upon the heels of the Great Tribulation comes the Day of the Lord, as Obadiah declares in verse 15. It is a time of reckoning, or as the prophet phrases it, "As you have done, it shall be done to you." This is a biblical law. The Romans called it *lex talionis*, meaning "law of retaliation" or "law of just retribution." In biblical terms, we know it as the "eye for an eye" principle (Exodus 21:23-25; Leviticus 24:19-20; Matthew 5:38). Jesus says that whatever we measure out to others will be measured back to us (Luke 6:38). Paul writes of it as, "Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap" (II Corinthians 9:6; Galatians 6:7-8). God says that this is how He will judge Edom in the Day of His wrath: "Your reprisal shall return upon your own head."

He continues in Obadiah 16: "For as you drank on my holy mountain, so shall all the nations drink continually; yes, they shall drink, and swallow, and they shall be as though they had never been." This last part can be better translated, "Yes, they [Edom and its confederates] shall drink and drink and drink until they drink themselves right out of existence." What a dire threat! God essentially tells them that, though they may gloat at first, He will deal with them in His day of vengeance and wipe them from the face of the earth! God does not take these things lightly.

Edom may have drunk on God's holy mountain numerous times. Edomites likely drank in feasting and gloating over Israel when Babylon and later Rome captured and destroyed Jerusalem. Perhaps they thought that the land of Canaan would finally be their inheritance. It could also be descriptive of the present status of the Temple Mount, currently held by the Palestinians, who have strict rules against the Jews' use of the Temple area. In effect, they gloat over their ability to forbid Jews from entering and praying there, yet it is truly not theirs to regulate. God's retaliation will be harsh.

Israel's Complete Triumph

The theme for the next section is found in Malachi 1:2-3:

"I have loved you," says the Lord. "Yet you say, 'In what way have You loved us?' Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" says the Lord. "Yet Jacob I have loved; but Esau I have hated, and laid waste his mountains and his heritage for the jackals of the wilderness."

God's choice is supreme. He made His sovereign choice of Jacob over Esau before either had done anything. They may have struggled in the womb, but He made His choice prior to them developing any character. He chose Jacob, and that is the end of the matter.

Obadiah writes in verse 17, "But on Mount Zion there shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness; the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions." This verse introduces an interesting distinction: "On Mount Zion [is] deliverance," but the end of verse 18 says, "No survivor shall remain of the house of Esau." The destinies of these two peoples are total opposites. Whereas God loves Jacob and allows a remnant to survive into the Millennium, no one survives of Esau.

There is no way to know how absolute this pronouncement may be. Will there be, perhaps, some few Edomite survivors counted among those who are converted—who become part of spiritual Israel, in effect? Perhaps, but certainly all the proud and gloating of Edom will be completely annihilated.

Verse 18 tells us, "The house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame." "The house of Jacob" may refer particularly to Judah, and "the house of Joseph" would then refer to the rest of the nations of Israel, led by the Joseph tribes, Ephraim and Manasseh. In any case, it indicates the entirety of Israel. Zechariah 12:6 contains similar language, in which the governors of Judah will be "like a firepan in the woodpile" and "shall devour all the surrounding peoples." Edom will be one of these devoured nations.

Obadiah 19-20 simply relates that Israelites will return and inhabit the original inheritance that God promised them. This is perhaps the most difficult part of the entire book to understand. Experts in Hebrew say that words that they would expect to be in the text are missing, so they do not know exactly how the phrases are supposed to fit together. Nevertheless, it is clear that Israel will resettle the whole Promised Land that God originally gave them.

Obadiah 21 is the triumphant conclusion of this short prophecy: "Then saviors shall come to Mount Zion to judge the mountains of Esau; and the kingdom shall be the Lord's." The book began with God saying that He is the prime mover of world events, and it ends with, "God rules all things!" As the Psalms often declare, "The Lord reigns!" (see Psalm 93:1; 96:10; 97:1; 99:1).

Herbert Armstrong, in *Mystery of the Ages* (pages 239-241), explains the "saviors" to be glorified members of God's church. He calls them "co-saviors with Christ." This interpretation is certainly a possibility. We should not, however, understand this to mean that spirit-composed Christians will in any way provide for spiritual salvation as Jesus Christ did through His sacrificial death by crucifixion. Instead, it appears that these saviors rescue or deliver people; they help them not only to survive but to thrive under God's rule.

Obadiah 21 parallels a prophecy of the Millennium in Isaiah 30:21: "Your ears shall hear a word behind you saying, 'This is the way, walk in it,' whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you

turn to the left." These saviors will assist Jesus Christ in delivering people from a way of life that is contrary to God's perfect way. They will help the nations to learn peace and righteousness, a way that produces loving harmony between brothers.

Zechariah 14:1-3, 5, 9 ties in beautifully with the last verse of Obadiah:

Behold, the day of the Lord is coming, and your spoil will be divided in your midst. For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem. . . . Then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle. . . . Thus the Lord my God will come, and all the saints with You [Him]. . . . And the Lord shall be King over all the earth.

When Jesus Christ returns, He comes with His saints—the saviors of Obadiah 21. They, along with Jesus Christ, will come and "judge the mountains of Esau." As part of God's government, their job will be to help govern the entire earth. This is the essence of the Kingdom of God, a time when mankind—even the Edomites, should any survive—will finally submit to God's rule.