

OUTLINE STUDIES IN THE BOOKS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

by

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CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

OBADIAH

The name of Obadiah which stands at the head of this the shortest book of the Bible, is as common among the Jews, it is said, as Abdallah among the Arabs. Both mean the same thing. Obadiah signifies "*worshipper, or servant of the Lord.*" Four of the prophets are known to us only by name. Obadiah is one of them; the others are Habakkuk, Haggai and Malachi.

Of the first, as indeed of the other three, we have the briefest possible account, viz., that his name was Obadiah; there the record ends, Abarbanel alleges that he was a converted Idumean, and adds, it is an instance of "the hatchet returning (according to the Hebrew proverb) into the wood of which it was taken;" but this account is destitute of foundation.

Jerome held with the Jews that he was the same person as the Obadiah who was governor of Ahab's house, and who hid and fed one hundred prophets whom Jezebel sought to slay with the other servants of God she murdered, I Kings 18. If so, then he is the oldest prophet whose writings have come down to us, and must have lived some nine centuries before Christ. It is much more likely that he prophesied about the time of the capture of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, and that he was contemporary with Jeremiah, or immediately preceded that prophet.

It will be observed that there is a striking similarity between these two prophets, and that their predictions against Edom are closely akin, cf. Jeremiah 49, 7-22, and Obadiah. Some dispute there is as to which copied from the other, or whether both copied from an earlier prediction. From internal evidence it is now believed by many that Obadiah is the original and that of Jeremiah is somewhat later; but whether the latter used the former or not cannot be determined, for there is difference enough to entitle us to the belief that neither saw or used the writing of the other.

Obadiah's design is to predict the overthrow of Edom.

The Idumeans were the neighbors of the Jews, and their kinsmen, being the descendants of Esau, the brother of Jacob.

But as they did not show any concern for the misfortunes of Israel, as they rather rejoiced thereat, the cordiality which might have been expected to exist between them gave place to intense and bitter hatred.

The Edomites, according to Obadiah, are types of those who ought to be friends and are not, who ought to be helpers in the day of calamity, but who are found on the other side. The prophet touches on their pride and self-confidence, vs. 3; then denounces their violence against their brother Jacob in the day of his trouble, vss. 10-14.

In the remainder of the verses he utters the most terrific predictions as to the final and complete destruction of Edom. The certainty of the future triumphs of Zion and the enlargement of Israel's borders is announced. Obadiah sees the house of Jacob and the house of Joseph, probably denoting all Israel, dispossessing Edom and occupying their land. Partially and typically the prophecy has been fulfilled, but no doubt it awaits a more complete accomplishment, when God will set His hand to recover His people, and make good to them the promises to the fathers.

The book of Obadiah is a favorite study of modern Jews. In it they read the future of their own people and of Christendom; for they hold that by Edomites are meant Christians who have treated them much as old Edom did their ancestors, and by Edom is specially meant Rome. Kimchi says, "All that the prophets have said about Edom and its destruction in the last times has reference to Rome."

The fifteenth verse of Obadiah is significant: "**For the day of the Lord is near upon all the heathen; as thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee: thy reward shall return upon thine own head.**" It is *lex talionis*, the law of retaliation.

Back on those who do evil against their fellows rebounds the like injury. A notable instance of it is seen in Judges 8:18, 19 and 1:5, where we read of the cruelty of Adoni-bezek which returned on himself— "**as I have done, so God hath requited me.**" Iniquity always recoils. Into the pit, the wicked dig for others, sooner or later they fall. The reprisals of sin are frightful.

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