

# ARAMAIC BIBLE COMPANION

## THE PROPHECY OF OBADIAH

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### INTRODUCTION

*Jerome's classic Latin dictum "quanto brevis est, tanto difficilis" (As much as it is short so much is it awkward) sums up the tedious issues Obadiah presents to the interpreter. Dr Graham Scroggie quotes the "Allegories of Isidore who said Obadiah was "Briefest among prophets in words, in the grace of mysteries their equal."*

### (a) DATE AND DIRECTION OF THE PROPHECY

The rivalry which became a generational feud between Esau and Jacob's posterity began with the "sale of Esau's birthright for a helping of soup" as recorded in the 25th chapter of Genesis.

Esau took up residence in Sela -the rose-red rock fortress which *Nebaioth son of Ishmael* and his brother in law (Genesis 25.13) first founded as a settlement carving out homes in the rocks.

**The prophecy I believe can be dated between the fall of Jerusalem in 597BC and the fall of Edom before the self-same Babylonians 4 years later in 582BC .**The Arab Nabataeans (see v.7) then took over the stronghold and founded the city we now know as Petra... James M Gray onetime "special instructor" of Moody Bible College supports this date. J.R.Drummelow usefully notes that the fall of Jerusalem is spoken of in *the past tense (v.11)* as an event that took place before the ministry of Obadiah. The first 16 verses of the prophecy are directed at the perfidious rump of Edomites but the final 5 verses are directed towards Jacob for Israel's encouragement in the light of the LORD'S great kingdom of the latter days. Whilst Esau will be a light soon to be extinguished Israel will, conversely, be a bright and shining light in the golden years of Messiah.

### (b) EDOM'S LACK OF BROTHERLY LOVE

This short vision was written down by a man called Obadiah "the Lord's servant". The prophecy is given concerning Edom. As a nation Edom first came under God's rebuke for refusing to allow Israel to pass through its territory in 1300BC en route to Canaan and earned His burning wrath for joining in taking spoil with the Babylonian conquerors in 597BC. The location of the nation was south east of the Dead Sea in a semi desert and arid location. Earnings were from control of trade and spice routes from Elath and along the King's Highway to Syria. The grandson of Esau was Teman whose seat was *ymyt* or Yemen meaning "south wind" who settled to the east of the Red Sea.

### (c) HERODS OF EDMITE STOCK

The father of the Edomite nation was Esau-of whom scripture says "Your dwelling will be away from the earth's richness; away from the dew above. You will live by the sword and you will serve your brother. But when you grow restless you will throw off his yoke"(Genesis 27.39ff). The line of Herodian kings was amongst the last remnants of those who could lay claim to Edomite ancestry. Scroggie spoke with perspicuity when he said "**the ultimate issue of all that Esau represented came to focus in Herod-that fox**" as our LORD characterised him. Herod Antipas married a daughter of Aretas but divorced her in favour of Herodias by consequence war broke out between them in which Herod was summarily defeated.

### (d) THE WAY OF LIFE OF THE NATION'S FOUNDER

Esau married two Hittite wives. The new testament (Hebrews 12.16) calls him a "profane person"*πορνος η βεβελος*" -an unhallowed catamine -what today might be termed a paedophile or idolater. Significantly the 15th verse speaks of *lmg* -"**YOUR REWARD SHALL RETURN ON YOUR OWN HEAD**" might read "**YOU'RE CHERISHING OF CHILDREN**". Schultens defines *lmg* as "hot fomentations applied in a cherishing manner to a new born child." It is precisely

the evil perversion of inappropriate love making with children that will be judged by God-and I mg can very definitely be applied in a bad as well as a good sense.

### **(e)HOW ARE JACOB AND ESAU VIEWED IN THE BOOK?**

Jacob's inspiration has its focus in that "Shiloh" to come-the person of our LORD Jesus Christ. Esau's posterity threw up the wily Herod who took issue with our LORD Jesus. Jacob is seen "suffering", Esau is seen as "proud defiant rebellious" in the words of Dr. Scroggie. The book is to be understood in terms of Pride leading to violence and issuing in Edom's punishment or judgment and Jacob's deliverance.

### **COMMENTARY**

*The mysterious "envoy" like the angels of the Apocalypse is a "hinge of history" and a "terror" to the unrighteous besides being a "messenger" with a "circular" or roving mandate. Thus Babylon is galvanised against Edom and within the military of Edom opposition stirs. The letter opens by setting forth testimony to the "hidden" counsel of God. "The LORD does nothing but he reveals His secret to his servants the prophets"-Amos 3. Obadiah is notable for the prophetic testimony with which it begins and climaxes.*

#### **THE ENVOY -EDOM'S DOWNFALL BY ARTIFICE 1-3**

The vision of Obadiah-thus says the LORD Yahweh to Edom-"We have heard a report from being in the company of the LORD. The sign of the accusative [ta] is equally a sign of intimacy or closeness. And a messenger on whom it hinges [ryx] has been sent among the Gentiles or nations An "envoy has been sent unto the nations" ryx-which term Solomon used for a "trustworthy person". This apostle of the Almighty had been already sent among the gentiles saying, **Rise -let us arise for battle against her (Edom) Behold I will give you to be as 'the little finger' [nfq] among the nations, you are very contemptible or proud Your pride of heart like boiling water [mdz as violent overwhelming steam boils over or lifts a kettle lid] has lifted you up O You that dwell in the carved out chinks of the rock. His rest is high or fortified -he says in his heart, "who will bring me down to earth?"**

*We need to be brought down to earth" and to be humble before God. This begins by taking Him for our Lord and worshipping Him as our "Rock" so that we do not trust in any other fortress.*

#### **THE ROCK FASTNESSES BECAME A TRAP 4-7**

##### **LESSON NO.1-PRIDE COMES BEFORE A FALL**

**If you cause yourself to dwell high like the eagle and if you set your house as the stars from there I will bring you flowing down whispers the LORD.** *This statement could serve as notice to any from Lucifer to Esau or Paul or ourselves-God knows how to humble the proud.*

**If thieves came to you and robbers in the night-O how you will be destroyed or cut off -would they not steal enough for themselves? If grape gleaners came to you would they leave a remnant of the grape harvest? How they have caused Esau to be investigated or searched and how they have questioned (probably under duress) concerning hidden treasure.** *Obadiah imagines the sheer vulnerability of the treasury-once surrounded below and warriors had secured the rock cliffs above those who guarded the wealth of this city within its famous high level rock carved treasury would be isolated. During the author's visit to Petra in 1995 (The Sela of Edom) there was no evidence of vines but because water was plentiful and aqueducts were an early feature of the settlement from earliest days the vine evidently was cultivated. All the soldiers adverse to you shall expel you to the boundary; all the soldiers "of your peace"... [Jml v -this one word "Peace" only once used in the prophecy but vital to its content and message is illuminated with brilliance in the context of the writing. For this usage alone as demonstrative of the workings of*

divine justice the book deserves its place in the biblical canon. The men are at once "men at peace" with Edom and men who "recompense" Edom-men "of friendship" and men of requital" who "preserve" and who "requite" a debt, who "prosper with" Edom and "make an end of" Edom. Nowhere in scripture is there a better exposition of SHALOM which both brings peace to the believer and "pays the debt" or "makes recompense through the Saviour's atonement]... **that eat at your table will forget you- and overpower you; they will set a net under you-none shall have intelligence of it.**

*The Prophet speaks of the Babylonians as driving the Edomites out. This did occur and the Nabataean Arabs shortly thereafter took over the entire area. That there should be perfidious action to trap the Edomites **through soldiers apparently loyal** to them who prepared to trap them in their high citadels is ironic. This punishment accords with divine retributive justice which requites the perfidy of Edom centuries earlier to the children of Israel.*

## **EDOM IS COMPLICIT IN THE 587 BC FALL OF JERUSALEM 8-11**

**Further in that day whispers the LORD will I not cause the destruction of the wise from Edom and understanding or insight itself from Mount Esau. So your warriors O Teman will be terrified because the male will be cut off from Mount Esau by killing. From your violent treatment of your brother Jacob shame will cover you and you will be cut off for perpetuity. In the day that you stood in opposition; in the day strangers took(infinitive)his military prisoners and aliens were entering his gates and cast a stone for lots over Jerusalem you were also as one of or united with them.** *The fact that this condemnation stands in scripture tends to suggest that the Edomites could actually have reversed the plight of Jerusalem. Josephus tells us of the great inventiveness of the Jews over 18 months and of their tireless courage and high morale. On this account it became an "entire struggle" in which the Jews were "of cheerful mind" continually "contriving different engines" to counter their foes. They were worn down by famine and continual darts in the end. A very little would have tipped the war in their favour-but Edom stood gloating at their entrapment.*

## **JUDAH'S JEOPARDY WAS EDOM'S JOY 12-14**

### LESSON 2-EDOM MODELS THE LATTER DAY DISPARAGEMENT AND BREACH OF FAITH WITH ISRAEL

**(1) But you should not have watched (as a bystander) in your brother's day...the ninth day of the fourth month in the 11th or last year of Zedekiah (587BC)if we speak of the actual day of collapse of opposition at a time of terrible famine...in the day of his repudiation or alienation.**

**(2) You should not have been radiantly happy over the sons of Judah in the day of their destruction.** *The terrible treatment of the royal household and many other associates who escaped to the wilderness in the night but were overhauled by their Babylonian pursuers the following day was no matter for pleasure. Nebuchadnezzar actually joined the captors though the conduct of the war was in the hands of 5 generals. The King rebuked Zedekiah for misuse of power-for he (Nebuchadnezzar) had settled Zedekiah on the throne. Nebuchadnezzar called him "a wretch, a covenant-breaker and one who had forgotten his former words of promise to hold the country for him" and proceeded to slay his sons before his eyes and then put out his eyes. It could only be the most callous of relatives that would rejoice at such treatment meted out to a friend. With just such joy Edom surveyed the last sufferings of the monarch of Judah and his family.*

**(3) You should not have twisted your lips or made a great celebration in the day of adversity.** *The wording may also carry the sense "making great your borders" which accords well with the sequel.*

**(4) You should not enter into the gate of my people in the day of their straits or being surrounded [dwa] Edom after 587 settled in Idumea-southern Palestine.**

**(5) You should not even have looked on their calamity in the day of their calamity and you should not let yourself loose in her riches or wealth in the day of destruction.**

**(6) You should not have stood at the crossways of "getting away" or redemption [qrp] to cut off those who were making their escape.**

**(7) You should not have shut up or delivered up those who fled in the day of adversity.**

*Here, then, are seven faults of the Edomites at the time of the fall of Jerusalem. In sum they stood by to finally repudiate Judah, they gloated in Judah's fall, from which they advantaged by confiscating wealth occupying land and possessing themselves of homes. Beyond that they cut off the escape of a remnant and handed over captives to the Babylonians.*

**THE HIGH PROPHETIC SIGNIFICANCE OF OBADIAH 15-16**

For the day of the LORD upon all nations is near. According to that you have done it will be done to you. Your recompense will be returned on your head. For according as you drank on the Mountain of my **Holiness** all nations will drink continually. They shall both drink and swallow and they shall be as though they never were. *The prophet is predicting the end of human government and the end of Edom takes on an epic allegorical status as a model of how many nations will treat Israel in the latter day. There will be no question of "the brotherhood of nations" where Israel is concerned. The LORD Jesus as judge of all the earth created a parable about his latter day judgment of the world's nations in which the central principle was "inasmuch as you did it to the least of these my brothers you did it to me". The attitude to Israel-the "the apple of God's eye" has always been important but it is now more critical than ever before.*

*(1) In the day of Jacob's trouble Jerusalem will be a "burdensome stone"(Zechariah 12.3) and they will be "angry" (Apocalypse 11.18)*

*(2) In those times nations will rejoice and gloat over Israel's adversity (Apocalypse 11.10); they will*

*(3) The inhabitants of the earth will send gifts to each other in celebration of the weakening of Israel's divine shield. (Apocalypse 11.10)*

*(4) Today pressure is being strenuously applied to push Jews to surrender swathes of their territory in a two-state solution-to divide their land as a dowry (Daniel 9.39)(Joel 3.2 "I will gather **the nations** to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. There I will enter into judgment with them concerning my inheritance, my people Israel, for they scattered my people among the nations and divided up my land"-this is a mirror image of the siege under the Babylonian generals in 587-except this time round the adversaries will be routed and judged by God*

*(5) The Nazi's confiscated the wealth and homes of Jews in the holocaust and the effect of the two state solution would be to derive homes and wealth from the Jewish people and state in the interest of those who have vowed to end that state. This solution may well come into being inline with what Hosea says "They will bind themselves in their two furrows"-an indicator of a political condominium of the latter days. (An agreement enabling this may well be part of the covenant noted in Daniel 9.27)*

*(6) There are examples of nations standing in the way of escapees-even Great Britain turned back 6000 men women and children in an un-seaworthy boat that had reached Israel from Europe on the alibi of exceeding the immigration quota to the land accorded to Israel. Shortly thereafter Israel fought sternly with the British peace-keepers and proclaimed a state which they would manage themselves in 1948. Nations stood by and watched Germany operate gas chambers and begin pogroms -Russia implemented some of the severest pogroms against Jews. Europe treated Jews abominably. For all these issues recompense will be paid in the wars and judgments of the Apocalypse*

*(7) Nations will yet conspire against the Jews. The Dragon power of the last empire will seek to sweep those who escape of the Jews from the devastating war of the last days-evacuated before what may be nuclear contamination. Israel is enabled to "fly on eagles' wings for refuge"(Apocalypse 12.14) but even then the world power of those days would pursue the Jews by a command of His mouth "to carry them to a violent end" as rivers in spate carry people to their death in the sea.*

**THE THREE LESSONS**

*(A) vv4-7 The "first" lesson which is on "pride" may by extension be adjoined to the NT teaching on "brotherly kindness"(PHILADELPHIA) which can profitably be expounded with the aid of the following texts:-*

- (1) Romans 12:10 "Be kindly affectioned one to another in PHILADELPHIA
- (2) 1 Thess. 4:9 "As touching PHILADELPHIA love the brothers nationwide more & more
- (3) Hebrews 13:1 "Let PHILADELPHIA continue to prisoners, strangers, partners, leaders.
- (4) 1 Peter 1:22 Add PHILADELPHIA using the sincere word avoid malice deceit hypocrisy envy slander.
- (5) 2 Peter 1:7 Add love to PHILADELPHIA to be effective & fruitful and recall you were cleansed

(B) vv12-16 The prophecy of the unfriendliness and hatred of nations against Israel in the latter days is the "second" major lesson of the book. This lesson may be used profitably to show that God has a concern for today that we should mission among all nations so that good news may reach all peoples for the betterment of life and spread of God's peace among the nations. Thus will come greater understanding of why God chose the Jews and chose the church and chose through Christ to redeem. Thus men's eyes will be opened to the return of Christ as the climax of history and due warning given of the judgment of nations in the valley of Jehoshaphat. This truth of mission when applied to the individual calls for involvement for the salvation of souls.

(C) vv17-21 The "third" lesson immediately follows in vv17-21-the contrasting blessing of Jacob in the latter day-the "spiritual birthright eschatologically realised in the Kingdom of Messiah. This lesson involves understanding how Jacob fully realised his birthright at Peniel and became a "prince with God" by intimate relationship. It involves deep respect for the "election of God" and takes us to viewing our own lives and human history in the light of "things to come" not just "things gone by"

### LESSON NO.3 JACOB VERSUS ESAU -THE BLESSING COMES THROUGH ISRAEL TO THE WHOLE EARTH AS IN THE GOSPEL SO IN THE KINGDOM

This little book begins and ends in a short lesson on "pride". For those who look for His appearing and His kingdom it bears golden truth in a far richer seam than scholars in denial of the implications of the book for the millennial kingdom of God can access. They will generally become bogged down in data on dating or Edom's past fortunes. They mine too superficially. Precious truths lie exposed to the view of any who will take time to give thought to the content by the help of the Holy Spirit. There is one wonderful quotation from Obadiah in the New Testament. Ask of each commentary on this book "Has my mentor grasped the far-reaching significance of this book and its context"? Obadiah verse 21 -the very last verse of the prophecy stamps on the book the purpose its entire prophetic matter exudes-Obadiah exclaims "The Kingdom shall be the LORD'S." That mighty proclamation is quoted in Apocalypse 11:15 "The seventh angel sounded this trumpet and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our LORD and of His Christ, and HE will reign for ever and ever". Christ is coming and He shall rule the nations for a thousand years and the seat of his power will be Jerusalem from whence the rod of His authority shall extend to the ends of the earth.

### MILLENNIAL BLESSING 17-21

**But in mount Zion there will be "a flowing away"(escape) from danger and there will be holiness and the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions. And the house of Jacob will be "a fire" and the house of Joseph "glittering flame" and the house of Esau late gleanings or ripe fruit (of judgment) and they shall pursue them and swallow them up and there will be no "woven remnant" [drc] belonging to the house of Esau for the LORD speaks again and again.**(Piel emphatic) If face of what is ahead Esau would be unable to weave itself a way out of the judgment of God-Adam and Eve might sew together fig leaves to endeavour to disguise themselves but Edom is naked before the dock of God. During the Maccabean period John Hyrcanus circumcised the Edomites in Judea and incorporated them into the body of the Jews. Joram 854-43 and Amaziah 803-775 and Uzziah 787-35 either reduced or cowed the southern neighbour but not

till the Nabataeans ejected them and the Edomites fled to Idumea were they finally reduced to non-nation status.

The doom of Edom is emphatic in scripture. Judgment is proclaimed in the following prophecies:- Jeremiah 49 7-22, Lamentations 4.21-22, Ezekiel 25.12-14 and 35.15, Joel 3.19 and Amos 9.12 along with Obadiah. From the days of Joshua Saul and David Edom had maintained "antipathy" towards Israel which in these latter days is promulgated by Ishmael wearing the new clothes of modern culture but demonstrating the old-time hatred. Now Ishmael's son first established Sela or Petra as a seat of settlement-today Ishmael inhabits the oil rich states and Egypt their ancient homeland. These nations in a sense were kindred since Esau and Nebaioth (Ishmael's firstborn) were brothers-in-law but they were not **one household**.

**(1) And the inhabitants of the Negev shall take possession of Mount Esau.** It has to be of interest that Obadiah and Zechariah 7.7 are the only post-exilic bible writers to mention that tract of land called the "Negev" in over 40 Old Testament references that can be accessed. This prophecy is now fulfilled for the family of Lot which gave us the Moabites and Ruth and the Ammonites or Jordanians were among the inhabitants of the Negev and became the people with suzerainty over Petra. During my 1995 visit the troops of King Hussein of Jordan were posted at the Treasury-with a formal role but also detailed to ensure that the rock homes were not re-inhabited by the Bedouin.

**(2) And they shall possess the Shephelah plain of the Philistines.** Again this prophecy is fulfilled because the Arab people of the south moved in the vortex of strife by a series of historical movements more recently featuring Beirut and Lebanon to the Gaza area and to a lesser extent along the coastal plain to Ashdod.

**(3) And they shall possess the field of Ephraim and the field of Samaria.** These areas in the modern state of Israel are designated "West Bank" and are also inhabited by substantial Arab majority populations. Now comes the joker in the "possession stakes"-

**(4) And Benjamin (shall possess) Gilead.** Taking Jabbok as the river that divided Gilead North from Gilead South the former possessions of Manasseh (N) and Gad and Reuben (S) on the Trans-Jordanian border and hinterland and having regard for Benjamin's allotment from Aijalon to the Jordan -a territory of some 25 miles East-West and at best 12-13 miles North South there certainly is no current fulfilment of this prophecy. In Genesis 49.27 we read "Benjamin is a ravening wolf-in the morning he devours the prey-in the evening he divides the plunder". In at least 14 biblical contexts Benjamin is inextricably linked to Judah. In Ezekiel 48.23 the allotment of Benjamin is larger than in the settlement under Joshua. It extends from the region of the dawn to the region of the sea [mdq tap] This suggests Israel shall in the Millennium reach over the Jordan to her original coasts allocated by God. From this it would follow naturally that Benjamin-Judah shall have possession in Gilead. This prophecy has yet to be fulfilled. It may await Messiah or it may be realised in wars that must be fought in the tribulation period. Another confirmation of the reality of this prophecy is that in Ezekiel we are told that bodies of the early tribulation conflict will be buried in a cemetery to the East of the Sea (Ezekiel 39.11)-the Salt Sea-an area Ezekiel calls "the land of Israel". Such a cemetery could not be used unless the land is in Israeli hands at that time.

**(5) And the captives of this army or these forces belonging to the sons of Israel** (the expression is linked to the fore-going Benjamin/Judah's "taking possession") (shall possess) **where the Canaanites were towards Zarephath.** This is Sidon and the captives are not Babylonian captives but Israeli captives left with nothing and settling in the Sidon Tyre area. This answers exactly to the 20th century resettlement camps of Palestinians who were refused sanctuary in Jordan-and who had fled the 1948 conflict without being expelled forcibly & ended up in Beirut.

**(6) And captives of Jerusalem who are in Sepharad shall possess the cities of the south.** This sixth prophecy to do with the end times is a priori enigmatic but when one considers the double fulfilment of scripture it is not at all mysterious. The area stated has been designated as **Sparda in the Median territory** of the ancient kingdom of Persia which in Babylonian times was known as Sepharad. In the Assyrian annals of Sargon it is named "**Saparada**". This interpretation states where the captives of Nebuchadnezzar ended up. However the more recent dispersion following the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70 also led to Jews having to leave their land with nothing and hardly clothes to cover their bodies. Many of these Jews settled in **Spain** long before the America's were

known and as **Rabbi Jonathan in his Targum argues Sepharad** was then the name the Jews gave to their adopted Gentile homeland.

**(7) And messiahs or "anointed ones"** (Referred to in *Apocalypse 11.4*) **shall come to Mount Zion to Judge the Mount of Esau and the Kingdom shall be the LORD'S** This most unusual prophecy predicts that there will be "anointed ones" in Jerusalem to whom we are to connect events that fall on the land that was formerly associated with Edom-which extended from southern Israel down to Eilat and into the Arabian Peninsula and through what is today the southern section of the land of Jordan. It would thus appear that in the time of the "anointed ones" sent by God in *Apocalypse 11* there will be miraculous signs and victories of Israel over her foes in the first half of the Tribulation. This phase of the Heptad will end on a dark note with a 10th part of Jerusalem falling and 7000 inhabitants dying in what John the Divine calls the "Second Woe". The heart of the Millennial blessings as initially stated in these last verses is an age of "Holiness" and "escape from Danger" centring on the time when the "kingdom shall be the LORD'S" (*Apocalypse 11.15*)

THE END

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**To the glory of the Lord**  
**Aramaic Bible Companion**