

THE
BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR:

OR,

ANECDOTES, SIMILES, EMBLEMS, ILLUSTRATIONS, EXPOSITORY,
SCIENTIFIC, GEOGRAPHICAL, HISTORICAL, AND HOMILETIC,
GATHERED FROM A WIDE RANGE OF HOME AND
FOREIGN LITERATURE, ON THE VERSES
OF THE BIBLE.

BY

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OBADIAH.

London:

FRANCIS GRIFFITHS,
34, MAIDEN LANE, STRAND, W.C.

1905.

INTRODUCTION TO OBADIAH.

It is very noticeable and worthy of remark how very little God's prophets have to tell us about themselves. When their own history is in question they are the most reserved and silent of men. This self-restraint is indeed quite unprecedented in literature. It is an unparalleled thing that an author should be so self-forgetful as those old prophets were. It is a thing, too, which other men do not greatly like. We love to know as much as possible about the face and form, the manners and the experiences of those whose books we read. No one of the prophets is more reticent than Obadiah. His name is all that we learn from him about himself. But with no one in the high and holy company have expositors busied themselves more anxiously. Some have hoped that he might prove to have been the godly chamberlain of Ahab in the time of Elijah, who shielded so many of the servants of Jehovah from the wrath of the wicked king (1 Kings xviii. 3-16); and others have identified him with the teacher whom Jehoshaphat sent to instruct the cities of Judah in Divine things (2 Chron. xvii. 7); and others still have fancied that he might be the overseer who was appointed to superintend the restoration of the temple in the days of the good Josiah (2 Chron. xxxiv. 12). These all bore the same title; might not one of them, it has been suggested, be the speaker of this prophecy? None of them suits exactly the circumstances of the case.

I. Perhaps, however, we may glean a little about HIS INNER CHARACTER AND HIS OUTER HISTORY from the prophecy itself. He was a man of genuine and deep piety. He records only his name, before he passes on to tell out the message which has been intrusted to him. But that name is a very significant one, and one which was much loved by Old Testament believers. Obadiah means "the servant of Jehovah," or "the worshipper of the Lord." When Obadiah makes known to us his name and stops short there, it is as if he said, "I do not care to disclose anything further; I am content and glad to be thought of simply as one of God's true worshippers; that is the only honour which I covet, the sole crown which I can consent to wear." We may rest confident that his was a very thorough and a very unaffected piety. Unquestionably, too, he was a man of fervid patriotism. The love which he cherished for his country went hand in hand with the love which he cherished for his God. He lived in a dark and distressing time. Judah and Jerusalem were passing through deep floods of trial. Powerful enemies had come against them; and in the day of their calamity those to whom they might have looked for help—whom they expected at least to refrain from adding to their sorrow and shame—had acted the unkindest and most cruel part. Lover and acquaintance and friend had turned against them in the hour of need; their bitterest foes had been men who were closely allied with themselves by blood and kinship; where they ought to have found succour—or if not active succour, then certainly neutrality and non-interference—they had discovered hatred and malice and blood-thirstiness. They were gloomy and terrible days for Judah, and Obadiah's heart was sore pained within him as he looked on and saw the violence which

prevailed. The present miseries of Jerusalem, and its ultimate greatness; the present triumph of its adversaries, and their ultimate overthrow—these are his only themes. "Upon Mount Zion shall be deliverance," he says, "and there shall be holiness; and the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions." It is his country first and last, and midst and without end. He prefers Jerusalem above his chiefest joy. And so this book helps us to understand the truth which other parts of the Bible confirm, that the love of one's native land is a feeling not only deeply rooted in our human nature, but acknowledged and commended by God. True patriotism and true religion go together; and men are not likely to love their heavenly King less strongly, or to care for the wide world less ardently, because they feel a great and masterful regard for the country whose sons they are. It only remains to be said about Obadiah himself—what has been hinted at already—that probably he spoke of what his own eyes had looked upon, of sufferings and indignities which he had witnessed and experienced. It is not likely that the wrongs under which he beheld his country labouring were all in the future, and were presented to him only in picture and imagination. We may believe that the iron had entered his soul. He testified what he had seen. It may be that he was one of the many inhabitants of Judah who fled before the inroads of their enemies, and were scattered homeless and forlorn through the cities of Palestine and Phœnicia.¹ Of this we need feel little doubt, that the miseries and results he depicted were not remote from him, but were to be found in his own time and about his very doors. Out of the abundance of his heart his mouth spoke. With this portrait of the man—a portrait which is not destitute of attractiveness, although it is so shadowy and vague—we must rest content.

II. It may increase our understanding of the book, even if it do not make us better acquainted with its author, to pass now to the CONSIDERATION OF ITS DATE. At what time in the history of Judah was it written? The question has received many different answers. Putting aside many of the ideas which have been broached, for the Book of Obadiah has been pronounced at once the earliest and the latest of the prophetic writings, we are left with two distinct periods, at either of which it might have been composed. One of them is the reign of Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat—a brief and inglorious reign. During it the Philistines and the Arabians, joining their forces, made an incursion into Judea (2 Chron. xxi. 16, 17). They captured Jerusalem, and slew most of the royal family, and retreated to their homes laden with spoil. This might be the sacking of the city, it has been said, which the prophet paints. This might be the occasion when Edom took that malicious pleasure in the downfall of his brother Jacob, which Obadiah castigates and condemns in those sharp and stern sentences of his. If that were so, he would be the very first in the order of time among God's seers and messengers, the predecessor of Joel by some twenty years, and of Amos and Hosea by more than seventy. But it is scarcely likely that this is the true date. An invasion of freebooters like those Arabs of Jehoram's day would not involve so complete and methodical a subjugation of the Jews as the prophet describes. They came for plunder, and they would retire as soon as they had secured it. They had no wish—probably they had not the power—to make an entire conquest of the land and the people. It was a sadder, larger, more devastating calamity which Obadiah had in view. And therefore the other period which has been fixed upon by many students of the book seems to be the more suitable—the period of Nebuchadnezzar's capture and destruction of the Holy City, the dark and dreary days when the Chaldean was in the land. We may reckon it probable that Obadiah saw the irresistible advance and the too complete success of the Babylonian army—saw his country lying abject and bleeding at the feet of the conqueror—saw the beginnings of the long exile. And that inexcusable glorying of the Edomites over the shame and ruin of Jerusalem, which roused his indignation more than anything else, may well have been one feature of so sorrowful a time. Indeed, it must have been so; for although the historical books make no mention of it, one allusion after another to this bitterest ingredient in the cup of Zion's humiliation and distress is to be found in the prophets. In their pages the cry for vengeance on Edom is heard again and again. Everything points to the conclusion, as most deserving

¹ It is suggested in *The Speaker's Commentary* that the word "this" in verse 20 indicates the body of exiles to which Obadiah himself belonged, and of which he formed one.

of belief, that Obadiah's work as a prophet was performed in that woeful year—588 B.C.—when God's city fell a prey to the soldiers of Chaldaea and the brigands of Mount Seir. It does not really tell against this conclusion that Jeremiah, who was an eye-witness also of these heart-breaking scenes, borrows in one passage some of the expressions of Obadiah, as though he were quoting from one who had long preceded him. For the brief and keen denunciations of our prophet may have been poured forth during the very days in which the wrongs that kindled his anger were being done; he may have spoken out of the midst of this furnace heated seven times; and then his greater contemporary may have taken up and elaborated his words shortly afterwards, when the acuteness of the pain had passed in some measure, but while the memory of the sharp anguish—the sorrow even unto death—was still fresh and clear. Following immediately in the footsteps of Obadiah, the weeping prophet caught and echoed the notes which his less famous brother had sounded out with such resolution and vigour.¹

III. Let us think now, a little more particularly, of THE CONTENTS OF HIS PROPHECY. It presents two pictures to our gaze, the one dark and terrible to see, the other bright and beautiful in the extreme. The dark picture is that of the sin and destruction of Edom. Edom felt no fear, the prophet says, and anticipated no doom. Its people were proud and confident and undreaming of disaster. They relied partly on the inaccessible position and the impregnable strength of their capital Petra, the famous rock-city high up among the cliffs, the town which was one of the wonders of the world, excavated as it was out of the mountain-side. Had they not exalted themselves as the eagle? they exclaimed in triumph. Had they not made their nest among the stars? Did they not live in "a peaceable habitation, and a sure dwelling, and a quiet resting-place"—live "on the hills, like gods together, careless of mankind"? And they leaned, too, on the wisdom of their sages and teachers—a wisdom, the report of which had gone out far and near. "The mount of Esau," with its curious and stable rock-houses, was known to be the home of "understanding." If danger were to arise—if the improbable should happen, and days of trouble dawn for Petra and its citizens—the ominous and threatening cloud would hang over it only for a little; the enemy would soon be compelled to depart; the skill of the wise men of Teman—men like Eliphaz, the leader of Job's friends—would not be long in devising a way of escape from defeat and disgrace, a safe and sure path to victory and honour and peace. So Edom dwelt secure, dreading no peril, imagining that to-morrow would be as this day, and much more abundant. But it was the mission of Obadiah to foretell the entire ruin and desolation of the haughty empire. God was to bring it down, he declared, from its home among the munitions of rocks. He was to baffle all its advisers, and to make their prudence and resource of no account. There was a reason for a doom so fearful—an ample reason. Edom deserved to the full all that it was by and by to receive. Obadiah details its sin in strong and burning words. He sees Jerusalem sacked by the heathen king, his own home spoiled and laid in the dust, the house of his God destroyed. Strangers carry away captive the young and the old; foreigners enter the gates and tread the streets of the city dear to his heart. And there, not only refusing to help, but triumphing with malicious joy, uttering words of scornful contempt, doing deeds of robbery and violence, were the Edomites. The prophet gives a vivid narrative of their cruelty and unbrotherliness; his eye could hardly turn away from the contemplation of the strange and piteous sight. He beholds them rejoicing in the gate of Jerusalem, and intercepting the escape of those who would have fled down to the Jordan valley, and betraying the fugitives to the Babylonian conqueror. These are the things which make the cry for vengeance break from his heart—vengeance on the false kindred who had become the proud oppressors of his race. Edom was conquered soon afterwards by Nebuchadnezzar, whom it had helped to destroy Jerusalem; the inhabitants of Petra were expelled from the clefts of the rock; and a colony from Chaldaea took their place. And, further on in the stream of history, the Jews themselves were permitted to triumph over their former enemies. Judas Maccabæus attacked and defeated the Edomites who had settled in the towns of

¹ The passage in Jer. xlix. 7-22, which is full of resemblances to Obadiah. I take for granted that Jeremiah was the borrower, and not Obadiah, because his verses are so much more elaborate and beaten out than those of the shorter prophecy.

Southern Palestine after Petra was wrested from them. He recovered the cities which they had taken away. He drove them forth homeless and helpless, as they had done to their kinsfolk four centuries before. So sin finds the sinner out, even after many days. But Obadiah's second picture is a bright and pleasing one. It is the picture of the restoration of Israel. God's banished, the prophet saw, were to regain their former possessions, and to overcome their ancient foes, and to spread abroad in all directions. They were to prosper and advance, until the grand consummation—"the far-off Divine event" to which the whole creation moves—was reached, and the empire of God was set up over the entire earth. "The kingdom shall be the Lord's"—that is Obadiah's last word. (*Original Secession Magazine*.)

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OBADIAH.

VER. 1. *The vision of Obadiah.*—*The Divine purpose in relation to humanity*:—A voice thundering at midnight is the voice of Obadiah. It was the voice of a stranger. His age, his country, his parents, his cradle, his grave, are all unknown. Yet his was a prophet's voice,—deep as the boom of thunder, and penetrating as the lightning it fell upon the fortified host of Idumea, and destruction was in every shivering note. He had been standing on some high pinnacle, on which he heard a "rumour from the Lord," and with the fidelity of incorruptible righteousness he breathed that fiery rumour across the doomed nation,—the sword was bared against Edom, and whose sought to turn it aside was cleft by the gleaming blade. The prophecy is short but terrible in its fullness. It is a single shout, but the cry rends the rocks of Edom. The Edomites were famed for sagacity, prudence, and general mental skill, but God here comes forth (ver. 8) as the monarch of mind, and says He will destroy their wisdom and understanding. The high priests of wisdom come together to take counsel against the Lord, and the Lord blows upon their brain, and their counsels are confounded; the Lord touches their tongue, and they babble the jargon of insanity. Looking at this vision as affording a glimpse of Divine purpose in relation to humanity, we may take our stand on two distinct facts. 1. Divine superintendence of human history. He is a shallow historian who records only the undulations of the social, political, and ecclesiastical surface. As a student of the universe, I wish to know not only the stupendous, palpable existences—the sun, moon, stars, seas, mountains,—but I wish to know their birth-forces. He who takes me to the earliest germ of national life is to me the true historian; but he who finds that earliest germ in anything short of Divine volition is unfit to guide me through the black ravines, or the temple corridors, or the mountain grandeurs of the world's entrancing story. In all Bible history we find God upon the circle. 2. Divine sanctification of human history. This vision of Obadiah is summed up in words which might well form the concluding sentence of the history of the whole world. These words are: "And the kingdom shall be the Lord's." As we look at this as the ultimate object of Divine government we see that a great sanctifying process is in reality continually operating in human history. God is working in the midst of her moral gloom, and He will work until the last shadow has for ever departed. We see but a scattered and struggling light; we hear but a voice here and there; we wonder how the heavens can become flooded with splendour, and how the air can be filled with one glad and undying song; and we should despair could we not lay our trembling hand upon the recorded oath of Omnipotence, and see in the van the "dyed garments," and hear at midnight the war-shout of Immanuel. This leads us to the inspiring truth, that all our hopes are founded in Jesus, and all our energies sustained by the mighty power of the Holy Spirit. (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*) *The tragedy of Edom*:—In later times Edom came to be the supreme antipathy and the typical enemy of Jewry. So when the actual Edomites ceased to be, the name was transferred, first to tyrant Rome, and then to persecuting Christendom, and the impassioned words of Obadiah became a favourite vehicle for the expression of the national and religious hatred. That is a misunderstanding and a misuse of the book. The prophecy is, indeed, instigated by indignation

against Edom, and the retributive destruction of that people is its theme. But the subject is worked out in a large fashion that precludes the suspicion of petty vengeance, and justifies the book's place in the record of revelation. The motive is not the gratification of national spite, nor is the aim to either warn or edify the Edomites. The seer speaks out of the need of his own heart, and to the hearts of the people. What creates his vision and compels his utterance is an indestructible sense of the eternal justice and fidelity, and of the Divine destiny of Israel in building up the kingdom of God on earth. The tragedy of Edom is but a part in the great drama. It is therefore presented on a vast stage, and has the world's history for its background. Very real and concrete to the prophet, no doubt, are the antagonisms of Israel, and his enemies, but none the less really and consciously, even if in a fashion grand beyond his conceptions, it is the collision of universal forces and everlasting principles that is embodied in them. Limited and material the presentment of those issues may be, but they carry in their bosom the consummation of the ages. Within the rivalry of Edom and Israel there was wrapped the eternal antithesis of truth and falsehood, good and evil; and the vision of an earthly kingdom on Mount Zion is finding its fulfilment in the silent, slow, but sure advent of the kingdom of God and of our Christ. (*W. S. Elmslie, D.D.*) *God and bad men*:—I. THAT GOD MAKES A REVELATION CONCERNING BAD MEN. Here is a revelation concerning Edom, the enemy of God and His people. Isaac had two sons by Rebecca, Esau and Jacob; Esau was called Edom, because he robbed his brother of his birthright (*Gen. xxv.*). 1. The forms of the revelation. (1) As a vision. "The vision of Obadiah." The prophet was a seer. The Eternal revealed Himself to the eyes of his soul. He who would be a true minister of God must see the thing before he speaks it—"That which we have seen and handled," man has a faculty for seeing the invisible. (2) As a report. "We have heard a rumour from the Lord." He heard as well as saw. The soul has ears to catch the echoes of eternal thought. 2. The character of this revelation, a message. "An ambassador is sent among the heathen." God sends His messages to the nations in many ways and by many agents. 3. The subject of the revelation. "Arise ye, and let us rise up against her in battle." The object of the message was to stir up the Assyrians and afterwards the Chaldeans against Edom. But our proposition is, that God makes a revelation concerning bad men; and the subject of that revelation embraces at least two things. (1) That their sins will ruin them. "The wages of sin is death." (2) That evangelical repentance will save them. "Let the wicked forsake his way," &c. II. THAT GOD PUNISHES BAD MEN BY BAD MEN. He now sent a messenger amongst the nations,—what for? To stir up the Assyrians and Chaldeans—both bad people—to wreak vengeance on corrupt Edom. Why does He employ bad men for this awful work of retribution? 1. He reveals in the most powerful way to the victim the enormity of his sin. 2. He reveals His own absolute power over the workings of the human heart. Thus "He maketh the wrath of men to praise Him," &c. (*Homilist.*) *Call to the battle against Edom*:—The stream of prophecy may be compared to the stream of a river. At its fountain it is inconsiderable, and reveals none of its future greatness. There is nothing in Scripture more clearly revealed than the ultimate triumph of the religion we profess. 1. What persons were originally represented by "Edom," and the cause of the Lord's enmity against this people. The Edomites were the descendants of Esau, who sold his birthright for a momentary gratification. The Edomites seem to have assisted the Chaldeans in their work of devastating Jerusalem, and to have instigated their utmost fury against Israel, the chosen of God. 2. What is to be understood by "the heathen"—showing that we are called upon to rise up against Edom, and that we have nationally responded to that call. 3. To adduce some reasons that we should continue to propagate the Gospel, notwithstanding the objections which are urged against that duty. 4. Make the inquiry of each individual—To which of the two parties will you join yourself? Shall it be Edom or Israel? Shall it be Baal or Christ? (*G. C. Tomlinson.*)

Vers. 3-5. *The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee.—Pride*:—I. THAT THE MOST DESPICABLE PEOPLE ARE OFTEN THE MOST DISPOSED TO PRIDE. Edom is described as "greatly despised." Small and disdained as they were, they were nevertheless proud. Men of great intellect and lofty genius are characteristically humble. An old writer has observed that "where the river

in the deepest the water glides the smoothest. Empty casks sound most; whereas the well-fraught vessel silences its own sound. As the shadow of the sun is largest when its beams are lowest; so we are always least when we make ourselves the greatest." II. THAT PRIDE EVERMORE DISPOSES TO SELF-DECEPTION AND PRESUMPTION. 1. To self-deception. "The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee." Pride is a wonderful artist: it magnifies the small, it beautifies the ugly, it honours the ignoble, it makes the truly little, ugly, contemptible man appear large, handsome, dignified in his own eyes. 2. To presumption. "Thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high; that saith in his heart, Who shall bring me down to the ground?" The Edomites are here taunted with the confidence that they placed in their lofty and precipitous mountain, and the insolence with which they scouted any attempt to subdue them. A proud man always presumes on strength, reputation, and resources which he has not. Ah! self-deception and presumption are the twin offspring of pride. III. THAT THE MOST STRENUOUS EFFORTS TO AVOID PUNISHMENT DUE TO PRIDE WILL PROVE FUTILE. Two things are taught here concerning its punishment—1. Its certainty. "Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle," &c. If, like the eagle, they towered high up into the air, far up among the clouds, nestled among the stars, and made the clouds their footstool, the fowler of retribution would bring them down. All attempts on behalf of the impenitent sinner to avoid punishment must fail when the day for justice to do its work has come. 2. Its completeness. "If thieves came to thee, if robbers by night (how art thou cut off!), would they not have stolen till they had enough? if the grape-gatherers came to thee, would they not leave some grapes?" 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; but it shall be utter, so as to leave thee nothing. Beware, then, of pride. (*Homilist*.) *Pride of heart*:—The prophet, having predicted in the former verses that God would accomplish the destruction of Edom by hostile nations, now intimates that their natural situation of strength shall afford them no protection. God is never at a loss for troops whereby to subdue those whose dwelling is in the high rocks. I. PRIDE OF HEART IS DECEPTIVE. The inhabitants of Edom imagined that they were perfectly secure in their elevated habitation of rocks. In this they were deceived. 1. Pride of heart deceives men in the commercial sphere of life. There are godless merchants in the world who are deceived by the pride of their heart. 2. Pride of heart deceives men in reference to their intellectual thinkings. 3. In reference to their moral safety. Their rocky places are no refuge against the retributive providence of God. II. PRIDE OF HEART IS PRESUMPTUOUS. 1. It presumes unduly upon the natural, temporal, and secondary advantages it may possess. 2. It presumes ignorantly, without taking into view the access which God has to men, notwithstanding their temporal fortifications. 3. It presumes unwarrantably upon the inability of men to achieve its ruin. III. PRIDE OF HEART IS DESTRUCTIVE. "I will bring thee down," saith the Lord. Men may make lawful things the subject of unlawful boasting. 1. Such men are often brought to humiliation by commercial failure. 2. By social slander. 3. By death. Their destruction is certain, lamentable, humiliating, unexpected, irreparable. (*The Pulpit*.)

Vers. 6-9. *How are the things of Esau searched out!*—*Hidden things searched out*:—All that any test or trial can do is to show what was in us already. In many places of the East there is the horrible disease called leprosy. When a man is feeling ill they have a curious way of discovering whether he has leprosy or not. They light a candle and put salt on the wick, and the face of every one who has not leprosy is white or pale, but if leprosy is in any one's blood, crimson spots appear on his face. The same thing can be done by the camera; a photograph will reveal the spots when the natural eye cannot see them. You sometimes do what, a moment before, you never thought you possibly could have done, and another says she could not have believed it of you; yet it has been done. How's that? Simply because it was in your heart before, and only wanted the opportunity to come out. (*J. Reid Howatt*.) *God in retribution*:—Man's sin is, that he puts his confidence on objects unworthy and unsafe. The Edomites trusted to the insecure. I. DID THEY TRUST TO THEIR MATERIAL DEFENCES? These are worthless. The cities of Edom consisted of houses mostly cut in the rocks. Nations may trust to their material

defences, their armies, navies, fortifications ; but they are as stubble to the raging fire when justice begins its work. Individuals may trust to their wealth, to material science and medical skill, to preserve their bodily lives ; but when justice sends forth its omisary—death, what are these defences ? Nothing ; less than nothing, vanity. II. Did they trust to their PLEDGED CONFEDERATES : these were worthless. " All the men of thy confederacy have brought thee even to the borders," &c. Those confederates were probably Moab, Ammon, Tyre, and Sidon, with whom the Edomites joined in resisting Nebuchadnezzar ; but these failed them, probably turned against them : and even their friends who were at peace with them and ate their bread deceived them in their hour of trial. " To no quarter could the Idumeans look for aid. Their allies, their neighbours, their very dependants, so far from assisting them, would act treacherously towards them, and employ every means both of an open and covert nature to effect their ruin." How often it happens that, when men get into adverse circumstances, their old allies, professed friends, those who have often partaken of their hospitality, not only fail them but turn against them. " Cursed is the man that trusteth in man and maketh flesh his arm." III. Did they trust to the WISDOM OF THEIR GREAT MEN ; this was worthless. " Shall I not in that day, saith the Lord, even destroy the wise men out of Edom, and understanding out of the mount of Esau ? " " The Idumeans confided not only in the natural strength of their country, but in the superiority of their intellectual talent. That they excelled in the arts and sciences is abundantly proved by the numerous traces of them in the Book of Job, which was undoubtedly written in their country. They were indeed proverbial for their philosophy, for the cultivation of which their intercourse with Babylon and Egypt was exceedingly favourable, as were likewise their means of acquiring information from the numerous caravans whose route lay through their country, thus forming a chain of communication between Europe and India."—Henderson. Yet what is the wisdom of man to trust in ? " He taketh the wise in their own craftiness." IV. Did they trust to the POWER OF THEIR MIGHTY MEN : this was worthless. " And thy mighty men, O Teman, shall be dismayed to the end that every one of the mount of Esau may be cut off by slaughter." Delitzsch renders this, " And thy heroes despair, O Teman." Teman was the proper name of the southern portion of Idumea, called so after Tema, a grandson of Esau. Men trust in their heroes. A false confidence this also ! God, by a breath of pestilence, can wither all the armies of Europe in an instant. Men who trust in anything short of God are like the man who in a thunderstorm takes shelter under a tree, whose tall branches attract the lightning which scorches him to ashes. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 8. **Shall I not in that day . . . even destroy the wise men out of Edom.—Pride in our wisdom.**—But we are warned by these words that if we excel in understanding we are not to abuse this singular gift of God, as we see the case to be with the ungodly, who turn to cunning whatever wisdom the Lord has bestowed on them. There is hardly one in a hundred to be found who does not seek to be crafty and deceitful if he excels in understanding. This is a very wretched thing. What a great treasure is wisdom ! Yet we see that the world perverts this excellent gift of God ; the more reason there is for us to labour, that our wisdom should be found in true simplicity. This is one thing. Then we must also beware of trusting in our own understanding, and of despising our enemies, and of thinking that we can ward off any evil that may impend over us ; but let us ever seek from the Lord, that we may be favoured at all times with the spirit of wisdom, that it may guide us to the end of life : for He can at any moment take from us whatever He has given us, and thus expose us to shame and reproach. (*John Calvin.*)

Vers. 10-14. **For thy violence against thy brother Jacob.**—*An old sin.*—In two aspects. I. WORKING IN THE HISTORY OF POSTERITY. " For thy violence against thy brother Jacob." The spirit of envy that was kindled in the heart of Esau towards his brother Jacob glowed and flamed with more or less intensity for ages in the soul of Edom towards the descendants of Jacob. It was shown in the unbrotherly refusal of the request of Moses to allow the children of Israel to pass through the land (Numb. xx. 14-21). Edom continued to be the inveterate foe of Israel. Neither a man's sinful passion nor deed stops with himself. Like a spring from the mountain, it runs down posterity, often

gathering volume as it proceeds. No sinner liveth to himself. One man's sins may vibrate in the soul of another a thousand ages on. This fact should—1. Impress us with the awfulness of our existence. It is true that in one sense we are little beings, occupying but a small space in the universe, and soon pass away and are forgotten; still, there goes forth from us an influence that shall never end. We throw seed into the mind of the world that will germinate, grow, and multiply indefinitely, and yield harvests of misery or joy. This fact should—2. Impress us with the duty of every lover of the universe to protest against sin in individuals. A man may say, What does it matter to you that I sin? My reply is, It does matter to me as a benevolent citizen of the universe. Its pernicious influence on the universe is inconceivably great and calamitous.

II. Here is an old sin REPROBATED BY GOD in the history of posterity. God's eye traced it from Esau down. How does He treat it? He reprobates it. Delitzsch renders the words, "Look not at the day of thy brother," and regards verses 12 to 14 as a prohibition; but we see not the authority for that. These Edomites, it would seem from the words, did stand on the other side without rendering help in the day when the stranger entered Jerusalem; they did "rejoice" over the children of Judah at that period; they did "speak proudly" in the day of distress; they did "enter into the gate" of God's people in the "day of calamity"; they did lay "hands on their substance" on that day; they did stand on the "crossway" and "cut" those off "that did escape." The Omniscient eye saw all this. The Jews appeal to Him for an account of the cruelty of these Edomites. "Remember, O Lord, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; who said, Raze it, raze it, even to the foundation thereof" (Psa. cxxxvii. 7). For all this God says shame should come on them, and shame did come. It may be asked, if it were the envy of Esau that thus came down from age to age in his posterity, and worked these deeds of crime, where is the justice of God in reprobating them? They only inherit the iniquities of their fathers. We answer—(1) Sin is essentially abhorrent to Jehovah. It is the "abominable thing" which He hates. (2) The very essence of sin is its freeness. Sin is not a forced act; no deed performed by a man against his will has any moral character, or can in a moral sense be either good or bad. The posterity of Esau were not compelled to cherish and develop the envy of their great progenitor. Each one could have quenched it. (*Homilist.*) *Social cruelty:*—

I. AS A SIN AGAINST THE CREATOR. The truth of this will appear from—1. The constitution of the human soul. (1) The existence of social love. (2) The instinctive condemnation of cruel acts. (3) Innate craving for social approbation. 2. The common relation of all to God. He is the Father of all men. 3. The common interest of Christ in the race. 4. The universal teaching of the Bible. The man who injures his fellow-creature is a rebel against the government of the universe. II. AS PERPETUATED AGAINST A BROTHER (vers. 10, 11). Why specially offensive? 1. Because the obligation to love is stronger: 2. Because the chief human institution is outraged. 3. Because the tenderest human loves are wounded. III. AS WORKING IN VARIOUS FORMS FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION. 1. Some forms are—(1) The lack of sympathy when Judah was in distress. (2) Positive rejoicing when Judah was in distress. (3) Participation in the work of their enemies. 2. Omniscience observes it in all its forms. God's eye was on the Edomites. Sin, in all its operations, is evermore under the eye of Omniscience. If we realise it, it will—(1) Stimulate to great and spiritual activity. (2) Restrain from the commission of sin. (3) Excite the desire for pardon. (4) Brace the soul in the performance of duty. 3. A just and terrible retribution awaits it in all its forms. Retribution is a settled law in the material universe. (*Homilist.*)

Vers. 12-15. **But thou shouldst not have looked on the day of thy brother.**—*The doom of Edom:*—The commentary on this prophecy is supplied by every traveller who has explored the recesses of the mountain of Esau. Every people that has the privileges of Edom, and like Edom abuses them, is without right to expect a more favourable issue from the hand of God. The general sentiment implied in this prophecy is, that a nation in prosperity abusing its advantages to the injury of less fortunate peoples, or even neglecting them in their distress, incurs by its conduct the displeasure of God. Apply the subject—1. To the religious character and improvement of England. It is not easy to form an adequate conception of the diffusive and pervading influence of British power. That

extraordinary influence is steadily, continually increasing; England is rising to be the great leader of public opinion among the nations. On all great political, commercial, moral, social, and religious questions the world is now looking to Britain. Then we plead with you on behalf of your country. You are the light of your country, and by making it luminous you become, in it, the light of the world. 2. To the conduct of England towards such people as have a peculiar claim upon its regard. The Edomites ought to have assisted, and not oppressed, the Jews. To us the sister island is surely as intimately related as Israel could have been to Edom. As to the colonies, little need be said. As England sows, so shall it reap. (*R. Halley, M.A.*)

Vers. 17-20. **But upon Mount Zion shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness.**—*Holiness on Mount Zion*.—The imagery of Scripture poetry often presents instructive truths, referring to more general subjects than those on which the sacred writer might, at the particular time, be called to dwell. I. Regard the text as respects MOUNT ZION. A grand Scripture type. Not only there God was worshipped, but there God Himself, as the object of worship, dwelt. Conceive of God, accepting Christ's atonement,—Christ standing as Mediatorial King on the holy hill,—the redeemed from earth actually worshipping there—and, in spirit, all true worshippers coming to God by Christ. You have thus that state of things of which Mount Zion, with its temples, its glory, its services, its worshippers, was a type. II. **WHAT SHALL BE THERE?** 1. The text says, "deliverance"; marg. reads, "They that escape." Two aspects of the same subject. Where do they come that flee for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before them? To Christ on this Mount Zion. They escape for their lives,—come to Him, and He casts them not out. They have "deliverance" therefore. Pardon, spiritual freedom, and blessedness. 2. Then "there shall be holiness." An undoubted truth, the penitent sinner, coming to God in truth, by faith, for pardon, is made holy, becomes a new creature. Justification and sanctification thus connected; the favour, and the image of God. Real holiness;—holiness of life, as well as of heart;—growing holiness. Nor is it anywhere else. They who will not come to Christ may sometimes have human virtue; they cannot have Divine holiness. Look at this mount. Oh, the blessedness of dwelling there. Well fortified, well supplied. God is there. You live in peace. He is preparing you for the higher blessings. There is the heavenly Zion. Only they pass to it who on earth dwell on the spiritual Zion. (*G. Cubitt.*) *The Church delivered, purified, and privileged*.—I. **THE DELIVERANCE OF THE CHURCH OF GOD.** Mount Zion signifies the Church, the entire mass of those who are given to the Lord Jesus Christ, and whom He has ransomed by His blood. It is remarkable that what is exhibited as the liberation of the Church is always conjoined with the destruction of some opposing power. The fact is, that the destruction of the opposing power is the means used for the liberating of the Church. Conquest in the world is triumph in the Church. Consolation is combined with liberation. Deliverance is the first and principal object which presented itself to the mind of the Lord Jesus. His death was a necessary step to His resurrection, His resurrection to His exaltation, His exaltation to the assumption of His mediatorial power. We see that Jesus Christ first fought and conquered, and then He became the liberator of the world. In the world He works liberation by instrumentality, and the great agency employed in carrying it on is the Holy Spirit. Liberation begins with Christ, but it does not end with Him; for, as He Himself obtained resurrection by the power of God, so there is another resurrection which takes place in the breast of every man who is the subject of His kingdom. II. **THE GRAND EFFECT WHICH THE TEXT SETS FORTH.** "There shall be holiness." The mount of deliverance is always the mount of holiness. Another name for holiness is spiritual health. Bring the whole to this one point, that the test of state is character; that wherever this holiness is met with, there the deliverance that has been effected on Mount Zion by the Lord Jesus is applied, and there the liberation that the Spirit of God works in the souls of His people is likewise brought to pass. III. **THE PRIVILEGES TO WHICH THIS EFFECT LEADS, AND FOR WHICH IT PREPARES.** "Shall possess their possessions." Canaan for the earlier saints. For us "the inheritance of the saints." (*John Campbell.*) *Mount Zion and its blessings*.—The coming of the Lord in glorious majesty to judge the earth is the burden of the Church's message to-day. Throughout the writings of the prophets the choicest and most consoling promises concerning the Christian

Church follow close upon God's terrible threatenings against His enemies. The main scope of Obadiah's prophecy was to warn the Edomites of the destruction which awaited them. The true Mount Zion is the Christian Church, typified by Mount Zion in Jerusalem. The prophet in the text points us to Mount Zion as the place where we may look for deliverance. From what? From a mere local religion with its centre at Jerusalem. The Kingdom of God's dear Son is for the whole world. From the blackness and condemnation of Sinai and the violated law. With this "deliverance" will be seen its never-failing attendant—"holiness." It was the great design of our Divine Redeemer to produce the fruits of holiness in His Church. The kingdom of God is not only the manifestation and free offer of Christ's pardon to penitent sinners, but it is holiness of heart and life. When the tree is made good, the fruit will be good also. (*John N. Norton.*) *The true Church, or the community of the good:—*I. A BENEVOLENT POWER. 1. It is connected with deliverance. 2. With purity. 3. With enjoyment. Possess here means, enjoy their possessions. II. A CONSUMING POWER. There is a fire in the true Church (ver. 18). 1. The characteristics this fire displays. What is the fire? The fire of truth, that burns up error; the fire of right, that burns up wickedness; the fire of love, that burns up selfishness. It is a strong fire; an extending fire; a steady fire; an unquenchable fire. 2. The materials this fire consumes. "Stubble." What is moral depravity in all its forms, theoretical and practical, religious, social, and political? "Stubble." Error to truth, wrong to right, malice to love, is but stubble to fire. III. AN AGGRESSIVE POWER. The Gospel is at once the inspiration, the life, and the instrument of the true Church. 1. The elements of which the Gospel is composed. "Grace and truth," or eternal reality and Divine benevolence. To show the aggressiveness of these principles, state three facts. (1) The human soul is made to feel their imperial force. (2) The human soul is bound to yearn after these elements as its highest good. (3) The human soul is everywhere restless without these elements. 2. The proselytising spirit which the Gospel engenders. Every genuine recipient of the Gospel becomes a missionary. 3. The triumphs which the Gospel has already achieved. Such thoughts as these tend to demonstrate the essential aggressiveness of the true Church. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 21. **And saviours shall come up on Mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be the Lord's.**—*Christ as a Conqueror:—*This is a vision concerning Edom, or the Mount of Esau, or Idumea, which are different names of one and the same country, the mountainous region to the south of Judæa. It is a prophecy of ruin to the Edomites, for their treatment of their kindred nation the Jews at the time of their trouble. When the remnant of the Jews were carried into Babylon, the Edomites behaved ill to their subjugated and suffering kindred. They "stood on the other side" (vers. 11-14). Edom came to ruin; but Israel, though sorely chastised and brought low, was never to be crushed. The text shows how the difference is to be effected, and its issue. Esau should have none to help him, but shame should cover him, and he should be cut off for ever. But saviours should come up on Mount Zion, and that for judgment against Esau, and the Lord's inheritance should be preserved, and the kingdom should be His. Possibly two, or more than two, events have been purposely mixed up together in the prophet's vision. 1. Understand by the "Saviours," the great Saviour. The Maccabean princes were saviours, but the Saviour Simeon and Anna hailed is the great Saviour. 2. The purpose for which He came to Mount Zion. For judgment. (1) The distinguishing between profession and practice, between the literal and the spiritual Israel. He came that the thoughts of many hearts should be revealed. (2) The same intermixture of judgment with present imperfection in it is visible in every part of the Saviour's work on earth. The prince of this world is judged, but he is not cast out. He is not abashed. (3) It is the same with the spiritual enemies of the soul of man, and of God. Yet we see imperfection in every part,—the imperfection of non-completion. (4) He is come for judgment upon the enemies within His people, as well as without them, the old heart that holds with the world and the flesh, and is in league with the devil. And the same incompleteness during our present state we mourn over here. 3. Look at the predicted end. The kingdom shall be the Lord's. That is promised and certain. (1) The kingdom shall be His over our rebel hearts. It often seems impossible, or at least hopeless now. (2) The Gospel kingdom is, and shall be, His. (3) The kingdom over all the earth,

over all that rises up against Him, is His. To this end was He born, that as a Saviour He should come to Mount Zion, to judge the Mount of Esau, and that the kingdom should be the Lord's. (*G. Jeans, M.A.*) *The God of our salvation and His instruments*.—The vision presented to Obadiah is shadowed all over with calamities of various kinds; but still we see God all the way through, justifying Himself in the eyes of the heathen, lest they should say that the punishment He threatened, was more than equal to the offence. There is a tenderness of spirit in what He says to the opposers of Israel, in the twelfth verse, which, while it does not and cannot alter His purpose, gives us a delightful view of His heart. I. WHO AND WHAT ARE THEY WHOM THE PROPHET CALLS SAVIOURS? The redeeming Saviour of man stands apart from all common saviours, because He is exclusively the redeeming Saviour of the Body, the Church. We cannot confound Him with deliverers of any secondary kind. He is separate from all others in this, that though He is without sin, He is in friendship with sinners; though He knows not what it is to commit sin, He does know what it is to take the burthen of sin upon His pure and righteous person. The saviours in the text are the messengers of God to the blessed children of Mount Zion, to those whom He has begotten in Christ Jesus; and they stand here in strong contrast with the enemies of all holiness, who are described as Mount Esau, or the carnally minded children of this world. These helpers of our feebleness are only instrumental; God appoints them and employs them; but they are to Him what the axe is to the woodman, they would be powerless but for the power of the hand that holds them. What a mercy that God sends these saviours among us to publish His will, and to stir us up to our duty! Divine providences are often saviours. The Gospel Word is a Saviour, inasmuch as it guides us immediately to Him who is the great mystery of godliness, and in whom alone is the life which makes a man alive unto God. The preaching of the Word is one of the saviours that is sent upon an embassy of peace to Mount Zion. II. IN WHAT MANNER ARE THESE SAVIOURS TO JUDGE MOUNT ESAU? Literally, the land of Edom. Typically, the world, which, in its scriptural interpretation, is "enmity against God." These saviours will sit in judgment upon the careless, the prayerless, and the ungodly. 1. Every chastening providence of God that has passed away from a sinner unimproved shall be a sentence of condemnation against him. Not to improve a dispensation is to undervalue it. 2. God's Word also enters into judgment with the unbelieving. The Word preached, but not laid profitably to heart. The Gospel Word has much to testify concerning many sinners in every congregation, who are satisfied with having the olive-leaf in their mouths, whilst there is no savour of fruit in their lives. 3. The ambassador of Christ has also something to testify in this judgment. He is likewise appointed to assist in judging Mount Esau. Can a condemning judgment possibly accord with the good news that we are commissioned to preach? Yes, for it is not the good news simply in itself, but the good news not believed in, not rejoiced in, that makes the judgment. III. WHAT DESCRIPTION OF KINGDOM DID THE PROPHET INTEND? He says, "The kingdom shall be the Lord's"; He meant to say this, that however Mount Zion shall be blessed, or Mount Esau cursed, the new throne which will be set up from this overthrow of the wicked, and this gathering together of the righteous, shall be Christ's. It is called a kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. Of righteousness, because every subject of it is righteous; of peace, because God is at peace with all who rest in it; of joy in the Holy Ghost, because in the Church triumphant there shall be no delight equal to that of calling the glorious God our Father, and the Son of God our Redeemer. One remarkable feature in this kingdom is, that they who are worthiest in the world's judgment are not selected to fill it, but they who feel themselves to be the unworthiest. This kingdom is also an invisible treasure within the heart of every child of God's adoption. Inquire concerning two things. 1. Whether the incorruptible seed is within you. 2. Whether you are checking its growth by doing every thing you can to sweeten your journey to the grave, and as little as you can to adorn yourself for the happy home that lies beyond it. Each of us should connect the kingdom of God with the spirituality and heavenly character of our own souls. (*F. G. Crossman.*) *The kingdom shall be the Lord's*.—But we are Christians as well as Britons. We acknowledge Victoria as Queen; but we acknowledge Christ as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. We acknowledge Him as King not of Britain alone, but of all the earth. We acknowledge allegiance to Him in a far deeper sense than to Victoria. Great as are her claims upon us, His are infinitely

greater. Our Christian patriotism, then, will be proportionately greater. We shall be still more eager about news of His kingdom from foreign lands than we ever have been of news from Peking or Port Arthur. If we willingly give up millions for the maintenance of the fleet, we shall gladly give up tens of millions for the extension of that kingdom which is the Lord's. The great trouble is that it needs faith to realise the greatness of the kingdom and the certainty of its prospects. The whole realm of the spiritual and eternal is to many of us so shadowy and unreal. The glorious things which are spoken of Zion are difficult to credit. There is a wide door and effectual before us in these days of ours; but there are so many adversaries that faith fails and hope is dim and enthusiasm languishes and dies. But surely, surely faith ought to be much easier for us than it was for Obadiah in his dreary, hopeless exile. He had no tens of thousands to share his hope and expectation; no thrilling tidings from the seat of war, say rather from the seat of desolation; yet see with what confidence he looks forward to the coming time, and with what assurance he declares that "saviours shall come up on Mount Zion to judge the Mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be the Lord's." May his faith inspire ours; may his patriotism awaken ours. (*J. Monro Gibson.*) *The kingdom of God*:—What is the kingdom of the sun? It is here on earth, and is in everything that lives and moves. It sings in the bird, and waits in the egg not yet hatched out; it is in the fragrant blossom and in the bud unopened; it is in the blades of grass upspringing, and in the germinating seeds just breaking through their shell in the darkness of the earth. Thus this kingdom of God that is to be is already here. This is the second truth that Jesus Christ taught about the kingdom—it is not something postponed; it has already begun. Here, as the day is here when the sun begins to rise; here, as the summer is here when spring begins to come; here, as manhood is here when the babe lies in the cradle, for then the man begins when he is born. The kingdom of God begins when it is first upon the earth, and it is first on the earth when the spirit of righteousness and justice and love and peace is in the hearts of men, and is working its way into the institutions of men. So Christ said to men, "Do not say, Lo, here, lo, there: the kingdom of God is among you." Look for it all about you; look for it in the mother's love, in the hero's sacrifice, in the patriot's devotion; look for it in the honest labourer, the faithful servant, the loyal friend. It is here; it is now. (*Lyman Abbott, D.D.*)