A Patristic Commentary

THE BOOK OF Obadiah

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OBADIAH

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INTRODUCTION

Obadiah:  
“Obadiah” is a Jewish word meaning "the servant of Jehovah”. The Old Testament mentioned many people with this name; as in 1 Kings 18:3-6, 1 Chronicles 3:21, 7:3, 8:28, 12:9, 27:19, 2 Chronicles 17:7-9, 34:12, Ezra 8:9, Nehemiah 10:5, 12:25.

His Background:  
This Book refers to the alliance of the Edoms with Israel's enemies and their participation in plundering Jerusalem (Obadiah 10-14). Jerusalem had been previously plundered in the days of Jehoram (2 Chronicles 21:16, 17) in the mid ninth century B.C. by the Philistines and the Arabs. However, most researchers believe that the book of Obadiah is concerned with the alliance of the Edoms and the Babylons -along with others- in the destruction of Jerusalem 587/586 B.C. Edom participated in plundering the city as they blocked the streets in the face of the escapees by arresting them and selling them as slaves to the enemies. In fact Edom did not act neutrally towards Israel, but rejoiced at the misfortune of his brother Israel and supported his enemy in destroying him by all means.

The Objective of this Book:  
This prophecy is addressed to Edom, who rejoiced at his brother's -Israel- misfortune; who has a stubborn heart and loves tyranny and oppression. Edom participated in destroying Israel in the day of captivating Jerusalem. In this respect, the prophecy assured an important spiritual principle that is applicable to all humanity: “…as you have done, it shall be done to you; your reward shall return upon your own head.” He reaps whatever evil, oppression and destruction he sought in his life. The book deals with both the haughty spirit living in lofty mountains that oppresses, destroys and rejoices in other’s misfortunes, as well as with Israel that fell cringingly and was exposed to cruelty- Edom and Babylon. But God saves him, after He has strictly punished him. He also makes Mount Zion a source of spiritual salvation, in that it becomes holy, a spiritual flame that burns all evil and lights the heart with heavenly love. As a matter of fact, it is a message addressed to each and every heart that suffers punishment lest he should fall victim to despair, but instead it must realize God’s plan for its salvation.

The prophet ends his book by declaring: “…and the kingdom shall be the LORD’S”. This is the aim of God’s work: to reign over every heart and to set His throne in us!

Edom:  
In studying the book of Amos (Chapter 1), we found out that “Edom” means “out of Earth” or “bloody”. It points out to the sensual man, who adores bloodshed and oppression.  
Edom is Esau’s nickname, who stood against his brother Jacob. The region in which the sons of Esau lived was also called as such; the land of Seir (the land of Esau, since he was hairy). It is a steep mountainous region that Esau and his descendants seized after they kicked the Horites. They showed enmity towards their Israeli brothers, as they did not allow them to pass through their lands when they left Egypt (Numbers 20:14-41).

David captured Edom and set guards over it (2 Samuel 8:13-14, 1 Kings 11:15-17), but they caused lots of trouble for his descendants (2 Kings 8:20, 14:7, 22, 16:6).
They were always making fun of the Jews especially when the Babylonians arrested them; thus many prophecies in the Bible were against them, as in Jeremiaiah 49:1-22, Zephaniah 2:8,11, Ezekiel 25:12-14 etc… and this prophecy as well.

After capturing Judah, which was totally wrecked, Edom took over many places until they reached the city of Hebron. Nevertheless, the Arabs put more pressure on them especially in the sixth century B.C. In the fifth century B.C. the Nabateans expelled Edom from its hills in the southern side of the Dead Sea, the mountain of Seir. They were obliged to move to the western side of the Dead Sea and Hebron became their capital. In the second century B.C. the Jews occupied Moccabi and Hebron, as well as other cities, which Edom had previously possessed. John Harkanious forced them to become Jews in 125 B.C., and then the Roman Titus destroyed Edom completely. In this way all prophecies concerning Edom were fulfilled.

**Edom as a spiritual concept:**

1- **Saint Augustinus** believes that Edom symbolizes the evil nations, who then accepted good faith through the prophets coming from Mount Zion. In this respect, this book stands for the church that unites the nations, which were previously the oppressors of Edom, as well as the Jews, who accepted Christian faith as is evident in: “...and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.” (Ephesians 2:16)

2- **Saint Augustinus** also believes that Edom, the oppressor and manslayer, stands for the oppressors of the church in the Roman epoch; he says: “How many oppressions had the church undergone?! What says the sons of Edom, the sensual people who worship Satan and the idols and follow the body’s desires?” “Remember, O LORD, against the Edomites the day of Jerusalem’s fall, how they said: Tear it down! Tear it down! Down to its foundations!” (Psalms 137:7).” And in this way the oppressors are despised whereas the martyrs are crowned.”

3. This is Edom, who cannot tolerate his brother Jacob; he oppresses him and participates with his enemies in humiliating him. This is mainly because Edom (Esau) was the eldest but became the last due to his desires. In this respect Saint Augustinus says: “The sons of Edom were the eldest, but those, who were born later, deserved the privilege, because the sensual desires degraded them, while others rose to higher standards as they belittled these desires.”

3- Finally, Edom represents the primitive, sensual, bloodily man, who loves enmity and inequity; who hates the internal spirit and can never tolerate it; as Psalmist says: “Tear it down, they cried, tear it down to its foundations.” (Psalms 137:7). Through baptism the cross eliminates our external being, so that an internal Jerusalem, a heavenly Mount Zion, is established in our inner selves; the human being, who is created alike his Creator revives day after day, so that he is blessed with salvation through Jesus Christ and is recognised as holy, in which the Holy Ghost lives to declare His Heaven in us. In fact, this could also be observed in the words of **Saint Augustinus** as he comments on the title of Psalm 60: “...and struck down twelve thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt.”

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3. On Ps. 137.
4. Ibid.
he says: “Edom means ‘earthly’; thus, one should conquer his senses, because if he wants to live divinely why should he be sensual?! Let’s subdue the love of worldly materials, so that we might experience the heavenly life: “And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.” (1 Corinthians 15: 49)¹.

**Obadiah and Jeremiah:**

The prophecy of Jeremiah was against Edom (Jeremiah 49:7-22), which is similar to the nine phrases in Obadiah’s prophecy:

- Obadiah 1-4 corresponds to Jeremiah 49:14, 16
- Obadiah 5-6 corresponds to Jeremiah 49:9-10
- Obadiah 8-9 corresponds to Jeremiah 49:7, 22

In this respect, all critics agreed that Obadiah did not depend on the book of Jeremiah, but rather the book of Obadiah is believed to be older than that of Jeremiah².

**The Devisions of this Book:**

2. His oppression to his brother 10-16.
3. The salvation of cringing Zion 17-21.

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Chapter 1

EDOM'S ARROGANCE

The Edomites, who lived in steep mountains and jungles, believed that they were a strong invincible nation. Thus, this book came as a persecution to the haughty Edom, in which God calls Edom as a breaker of the penal code. God sent a prophet to summon the nations, so they might attend the session and examine the judicial battle in the courthouse. Edom, who thought that nobody could ever persecute him, is brought to justice; the book, thus, starts as follows:

“The vision of Obadiah: Thus says the Lord God concerning Edom; we have heard a rumour from the Lord, and an ambassador is sent among the heathen, arise ye, and let us rise up against her in battle. Behold, I have made you small among the heathen: you are greatly despised. The pride of your heart has deceived you, you that dwell in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high; that says in his heart who shall bring me down to the ground?” (Obadiah 1-3)

The word "vision" in the Hebraic language "Hazon" refers to the impalpable experience, but when it is used as an editorial or a book title, it comes to mean "observation" or "word". In this respect, Obadiah wrote down what he observed or heard through the Holy Spirit concerning Edom's persecution by the Lord himself.

The book says: "We have heard from the Lord", as if he had received a report from God; He sent a prophet to the nations to gather them to attend the persecution. It also came in Jeremiah: “Assemble yourselves to attack it! Rise up for battle!”(Jeremiah 49:14). It is a persecution that is both dangerous and serious; as He says: “arise ye, and let us rise up against her in battle.” It is more like a battle than a persecution, as Edom refuses to attend believing himself to be invincible.

Edom thought that living in mountains exempts him from coming to the courtyard. Therefore, God rebuked him for his arrogance asking him as if in an examination: Behold, I have made you small among the heathen: you are greatly despised”. You come to believe that you are greater than others only because you live in Mount Seir, whose rocky peaks may reach 2000 feet. As you think highly of yourself, I regard you with contempt; no sin can totally destroy a man's life like arrogance, which makes him think of himself as a god, but God greatly despises him, and he is left to eternal damnation. In this respect, Saint Isaiah comments: “Observe yourself strictly and avoid the love of power, glory and praise as spiritual wounds, death and damnation as eternal suffering”.

Father St. Isaac Suryan also says: “The temporal glory resembles an invisible rock in the sea, of which the sailor is unaware until the ship hits it and is wrecked”.

“The pride of your heart has deceived you, you that dwell in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high; that says in his heart who shall bring me down to the ground?” His heart is full of pride; he thought highly of himself. In fact, the heart, according to the Simians, refers to the understanding; thus, his own understanding deceived him, particularly with respect to living in the rocks of Sela; “Sela” might refer

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1 Jerome Biblical commentary, P. 444.
to Mount Seir that is high and steep, or to, as some researchers suppose, Edom’s capital “Sela” (Judges 1:36, 2 Kings 14:7, Isaiah 16:1). Others believe it to be Petra (a rock) of the days of the Nabateans. Anyway, Edom supposed that by living through rocks nobody could bring him down or even persecute him.

“Though you exalt yourself as the eagle, and though you set your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down, says the LORD” (Obadiah 4).

God brings down those who think highly of themselves. Edom thought he were an eagle, for he made his nest on mountainous peaks and in the jungles (resembling the eagle’s nest among the stars). He was really among the stars, but this did not deny that Almighty God could reach him. Edom thought just like his father Satan, whose arrogance appears when the Lord tell him: “You said in your heart, I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High. But you are brought down to the grave, to the depths of the pit.” (Isaiah 14:13, 14) Satan desired to establish his throne over the stars, but he fell to hell, because he gave up his angelic, humble nature. On the other hand, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy Supreme, came down to us, and hence a star preached His arrival!

“If thieves had come to you, if robbers by night -Oh, how you will be cut off!, would they not have stolen till they had enough? If grape-gatherers had come to you, would they not have left some grapes? Oh, how Esau shall be searched out! How are his hidden treasures sought up?” (Obadiah 5, 6)

As they lived in the clefts of the rock, they were known to have many thieves. This is because a thief hides, so that he might steal whatever he desires; the precious materials. He steals during nights, while you are asleep, so he can get what he wants. Thus, if grape-gatherers came, they will not leave the orchard except with very few grapes, which is the refuse; this is what thieves tend to do. Then, will it be difficult for The Creator to enter Esau’s hiding places (Edom), check its depth, and prosecute whom He wishes?!

Now that He showed him his narrow-mindedness, that his arrogance does not save him but destroys him, and that his hills did not support him but brought him down; now He mentions those, whom he counts on: the allies and the wise men.

Firstly: As for his allies, who signed a treaty and made peace with him, they were to testify against him in court. Babylon provoked him to antagonize and steal his brother; this Babylon will testify against him after laying an ambush for him. The Lord says: “All men in your confederacy shall force you to the border; the men at peace with you shall deceive you and prevail against you. Those who eat your bread shall lay a trap for you. There is no understanding in it.” (Obadiah 7); He meant to tell him: You were unwise…you depended on those, who destroy you, and not on He, who saves you. This is the outcome of having evil friends …while they pretend to be kind to him sharing together the evil plans and banquets, they turn against him and destroy him.

Secondly: Edom was famous for its Wiseman, like Aliaz the Timan (2:11), who came from Timan that lies 5 miles to the east of Petra in Edom. However, God exterminates those Wisemen as well: “Shall I not in that day, says the LORD, even destroy the wise men from Edom, and understanding from the mountains of Esau? Then your mighty men, O Teman, shall be dismayed, to the end that everyone from the mountains of Esau may be cut off by slaughter.” (Obadiah 8, 9) God not only degrades
him by driving his friends to be his enemies and the testifiers against him, but He also deprives him of his wise men in Edom.
Chapter 2

HIS OPPRESSION TO HIS BROTHER

God called the haughty Edom and brought him to court in front of the nations. He announced the invalidity of his defenders, whether they are allies or wise men; and before issuing the verdict He stresses the accusation declaring the recitals of the verdict...

“For your violence against your brother Jacob shame shall cover you, and you shall be cut off for ever.” (Obadiah 10)

Edom’s arrogance made him scorn Almighty God believing that He will not condemn him; and thus he planned to oppress his own brother! As a matter of fact, he, who does not love God, cannot love his brother, and who sins before God would certainly err to his brother. This is mainly because our relationship with God and that with our brothers is inseparable. Thus, God considered the commandment of loving one’s brother like that of loving God; they even complete each other. Oppressing others makes man ashamed.

God uncovers his oppression, saying: “In the day that you stood on the other side, in the day that the strangers carried away captive his forces, and foreigners entered into his gate, and cast lots upon Jerusalem, even you was as one of them.” (Obadiah 11)

He reminds him of the day of captivating Jerusalem, when its material and human capacities were plundered, and the strangers broke into the city contaminating it and casting lots on the spoils. However, Edom did not support his brother or even act neutrally towards him, but rather he became one of the strangers who robbed Jerusalem. It’s a horrible picture of a person who contributes to destroying his brother!

Edom should not have done such a thing; he was committed to seven issues, whose opposite he carried on:

1- “But you should not have looked on the day of your brother in the day he became stranger;” (Obadiah 12) You were watching him, as if you were longing for this day.

2- “…neither should you have rejoiced over the children of Judah in the day of their destruction;” (Obadiah 12) You were rejoicing their destruction, while you should have grieved for their pain, even if they were under a my fair chastisement. As we have seen in Amos, God condemned those, who do not share the pain of the people being fairly rebuked by God, saying: “But they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph” (Amos 6:6). In a speech by St. Amprosious about repentance he said: “The first aptitude is to know how I can deeply grieve with those who have sinned, because this is the greatest virtue.” Oh God, let me behold the falling of every man, so I could bear his burden with him, so I will not haughtily rebuke him, but rather grieve and weep, because when weeping on others, I will also weep on my self, saying: “She has been more righteous than I” (Genesis 38: 26).

3- “Neither should you have spoken proudly in the day of distress.” (Obadiah 12) This is how he turned from the desire to see his brother distressed to being internally happy for his pain; then he turned to speak reproaching words to lure the enemy against him. In his grieve for his brother he should have kept silent, if he could not defend him, but rather he spoke with evil on his brother.
4- “You should not have entered into the gate of my people in the day of their calamity;” (Obadiah 13) It’s a painful break-into towards God himself that they have entered into the gates of His people. Just Origen said: “If the human was paining for God, so God himself will be the pain holder…” Thus, every break-into the gates of a distressed man is a break-into against God himself. When our souls are distressed by grieve, God will not just stand there comforting us, but He shall put Himself in distress with us. He does not just support us from the outside, but rather He announces His dwelling in us, carrying our cross and beholding us in the power of His resurrection.

5- “Yea, you should not have looked on their affliction in the day of their calamity” (Obadiah 13) The looks here are tougher than before, when they were longing looks to rejoice the pain before hand, but here He sees the pain and grief with His own eyes, thus getting deeply touched even if they were His enemies.

6- “Nor have laid hands on their substance in the day of their calamity.” (Obadiah 13) He should have supported him, but unfortunately he laid his hands to destroy any chance he's got for resistance; his grudge turned from rejoicing to breaking-into his gates, to words of reproach, and finally to working against him.

7- “Neither should you have stood in the crossway, to cut off those of his that did escape; neither should you have delivered up those of his that did remain in the day of distress.” (Obadiah 14) This a terrible image, as he stands on the road to cut off those who managed to escape and to deliver them to their enemies as slaves! It is very inhumane!

The Decree:

After demonstrating his wickedness and oppression towards his brother, the decree was raised: “For the day of the Lord is near upon all the heathen: as you have done, it shall be done unto you: your reward shall be return upon your own head. For as you have drunk upon my holy mountain, so shall all the heathen drink continually, yea they shall drink, and they shall swallow down, and they shall be as though they had not been.” (Obadiah 15, 16) The decree was raised upon all “as you have done, it shall be done unto you”. That is the law of God’s Great Day, as He says: “With what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again.” (Mathew 7: 2).

Most researchers see that drinking here refers to the wine cup of God's wrath. If God allowed his people to drink from this glass due to their sins, so Edom shall drink it bitterly and so shall all the nations, because of their wickedness; it came in the book of Jeremiah: “For thus says the Lord God of Isreal unto me; take the wine cup of this fury at my hand, and cause all the nations to whom I send you, to drink it. And they shall drink, and be moved, and be mad, because of the sword that I will send among them.” (Jeremiah 25:15, 16) But here He said: “they shall drink, and they shall swallow down, and they shall be as though they had not been”, which means that as they took a punishment, they will drink it and swallow it; thus, when a tougher one comes unto them, the previous one would be as nothing.
Chapter 3

THE SALVATION OF CRINGING ZION

If this prophecy is directed to the haughtily and oppressive Edom to realize that as he has done it will be done unto him, it is also directed to the distressed Zion to assure her that God will not leave her cringing; He chastens, but has mercy; He allows for wounds and pain, but bandages.

“But upon mount of Zion shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness; and the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions. And the house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau for stubble, and they shall kindle in them, and devour them; and there shall not be any remaining of the house of Esau; for the Lord hath spoken it.” (Obadiah 17, 18) It is a live image for returning Zion to its power, holiness and honour. On its mountain will be life and salvation, as the cross will embrace every faithful soul, giving it authority to tread on serpent and scorpions; He will make a sacred temple out of it, in which the God's Holy Spirit will dwell; God will reign over its heart as His own throne; it shall be a fiery Holy Spirit burning down the house of Esau (which refers to the acts of the heathen man) like stubble; and the sin will not be able to stand it, but will burn and be cut off, as: “There shall not be any remaining of the house of Esau; for the Lord hath spoken it”. God’s word will act in us by his Holy Spirit, leaving no room for any internal evil.

Then, he speaks about the salvation, which will be partially ascertained by the return of Israel and Judah from captivation, and fully ascertained in the New Testament through His cross.

At the end the children of God will not only return to their previous state, but will heir the nations that rejoiced their captivation.

It is a live image of the spiritual church of the New Testament, which gathered so many souls for her bridegroom from all nations and tongues, so He shall reign on them all.

He says: “And saviours shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be the Lord’s.” (Obadiah 21) St. Augustine says: “The saviours are the apostles, who came out of Judah to preach on the mountain of Esau, among the nations, to hunt them to the Kingdom of God.” Therefore this book ends by saying: “And the kingdom shall be the Lord’s.” This is the main task of the Holly Bible, which was repeated again on the birth of Christ: “And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom shall be no end.” (Luke 1:33); it also came in the Revelation: “The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ” (Revelation 11:15); and: “Alleluia; for the Lord God omnipotent reigns” (Revelation 16:6).