

Preface To The Prophet Obadiah

(1532)

Obadiah does not indicate the time when he lived, but his prophecy applies to the time of the Babylonian Captivity, for he encourages the people of Judah with the thought that they shall return to Zion.

His prophecy is directed especially against Edom, or Esau, which bore an especial and everlasting hatred and envy against the people of Israel and Judah, as usually happens when friends turn against each other; and especially when brothers fall into hatred and enmity against each other, that enmity is beyond measure.

So the Edomites hated the Jewish people immeasurably, and had no greater joy than to see the captivity of the Jews, and boasted and mocked at them in their misery and wretchedness. Almost all the prophets denounce the Edomites because of their hateful wickedness; even Psalm 137:7 complains of them and says, “Remember the Edomites, O Lord, in the day of Jerusalem, who said, ‘Down with it, down with it to its foundation.’”

Such conduct as this inflicts more than ordinary pain, this mocking and laughing at the wretched and the troubled, this defying them and boasting against them, which subjects their faith in God to great and strong temptations and urges them mightily to despair and unbelief. Therefore God here appoints a special prophet against these vexatious mockers and tempters. He encourages those who are troubled and strengthens their faith with threats and denunciations against these hostile Edomites, i.e., those who mock the wretched with promises and assurances of future help and rescue. He is, in very deed, a needed comfort and a useful Obadiah in such distress.

At the end, he prophesies of Christ’s Kingdom that it shall be not at Jerusalem only, but everywhere. For he mixes all the nations together, — Ephraim, Benjamin, Gilead, the Philistines, the Canaanites, Zarephath, — and this cannot be understood to refer to the temporal kingdom of Israel, for according to the law of Moses, these tribes and peoples had to be separated in the land.

The Jews interpret Zarephath to mean France and Sepharad to mean Spain. I let that go and believe none of it. On the contrary, I let Zarephath be the town near Sidon and Sepharad a town or district in Assyria where those at Jerusalem were captives, as the text plainly says, “And the captives of Jerusalem that are at Sepharad.” But let anyone believe about this what he will.