

CHAPTER XII

O B A D I A H

Obadiah and Jeremiah.

OUR interpretation of Obadiah must in measure depend on the date we give it, and this in turn depends on how we explain the connexion of vers. 1-9 with Jer. 49: 7-22. If we read the two side by side, it should be obvious that some connexion exists. The relevant parallelisms are:

Obad. vers. 1-4	Jer. 49: 14-16
vers. 5, 6	9, 10
vers. 8, 9a	7b, 22b

The connexion is explained in three main ways:—

(1) Jeremiah quoted from Obadiah. This, formerly the most widely held view, has a great deal to be said in its favour. The capture of Jerusalem described in ver. 11 would be that mentioned in II Chron. 21: 16f, *c.* 843 B.C. If this is so, Obadiah is the oldest of the prophetic books; this would explain its apparently primitive picture of the Day of the Lord, its early position in the Book of the Twelve, and indeed why it was preserved for us. Its position among The Twelve suggests that the Jewish scribes accepted that the evidence pointed to its use by Jeremiah.¹

The arguments against this view are almost conclusive. If the Edomites had behaved in such a way as the prophecy suggests at the capture of the city in 843 B.C., it is very hard to understand why the writer of Chronicles did not mention them. Further, if the disaster to Jerusalem had been on the scale suggested by vers. 11-14, it is very strange that it was passed over in silence by Kings, while II Chron. 21: 16f makes the impression of little more than a plundering raid. No other capture of Jerusalem, except that by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. will fit the picture, for those mentioned in I Kings 14: 25f, II Kings 14: 8-14 are on various grounds unsuitable.

(2) Obadiah used Jer. 49: 7-22. Though this view has received little support, Aalders² seems to be correct, when he maintains that it is proved by the use of the feminine "her"

¹ See ISBE, article Obadiah, Book of; Young, p. 252f; Kirkpatrick, pp. 34-40.

² Aalders: *Recent Trends in Old Testament Criticism*, p. 15.

in Obad. ver. 1. Nowhere else, except Mal. 1: 4, is Edom feminine, and in this one exception the use is probably correctly explained by G. A. Smith, "The verb in the feminine indicates that the population of Edom is meant."¹ This cannot be applied to Obad. ver. 1. The parallel in Jer. 49: 14 also has the feminine, but it refers not to Edom but to Bozrah, which is feminine. So it would seem that Obadiah quoted this verse from Jeremiah without altering the grammar.

In spite of difficulties made or left unsolved by this view, it does make the capture of Jerusalem referred to in vers. 11-14 the capture by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C., when as we know from Ezek. 35, Ps. 137: 7; Lam. 4: 21f, the Edomites did so behave. It should be noted too that in contrast to Obadiah, Jer. 49: 7-22, which is dated 605 B.C. (Jer. 46: 1f), brings no specific charge against Edom.

(3) The most commonly held view to-day is that both Obadiah and Jer. 49: 7-22 are quoting an older prophecy. That this is possible may be seen from the analogous cases of Isa. 2: 2-5; Mic. 4: 1-5 (see pp. 48, 63) and Isa. 15f (see p. 52). Since, however, this view normally assumes that Jer. 49: 7-22 is not by Jeremiah, does not answer Aalders' argument and is no more effective than the second view in meeting certain inherent difficulties in a late date for Obadiah, we are not attracted by it.² It agrees with the second view in making the capture of Jerusalem that in 586 B.C. We shall probably be safe in accepting that Obadiah cannot have been written before that date. Harrison, p. 902f, inclines to view 3.

The Date of Obadiah.

Though we have decided that Obadiah will not be earlier than 586 B.C. we must still decide whether the verbs in vers. 2, 6f refer to the past, or whether they are prophetic perfects.

In the sixth century B.C. there seems to have been a wave of pressure by the Nabatean and other Arab tribes on the lands east of Jordan. By the time of Malachi, c. 450 B.C., Edom may well have already been driven from her old territory (Mal. 1: 3f). Already by the time of the return in 538 B.C. the South of Judaea as far as north of Hebron seems to have been in Edomite hands, and remained so until conquered and forcibly Judaized by John Hyrcanus, c. 125 B.C., thus opening the way for the half Edomite Herod to become king of the Jews. We know that Petra was in the hands of the Nabateans in 312 B.C., but they may have conquered it much earlier.

We shall probably be safe in assuming that the verbs in

¹ G. A. Smith II, p. 352.

² For an exposition of this view see HDB, article, Obadiah, Book of.

vers. 2, 6f are prophetic perfects, and that Obadiah prophesied early in the exile, when the Edomites were already moving into Judaeen territory under Nabatean pressure, but before their traditional territory was seriously threatened. This would make Obadiah the only prophet prophesying on Judaeen soil during the exile, and would go a long way towards explaining why this, by far the shortest of the prophets, was preserved. It would also explain why the sin of Judah is not mentioned in connexion with the Day of the Lord—for Judah in exile was already under Jehovah's judgment—and why special stress is laid on Israel possessing his possessions (ver. 17). A prophet's vision of the future is normally influenced by the circumstances of his own day.

The Coming Destruction of Edom (vers. 1–14, 15b).

It should be noticed that almost certainly the two halves of ver. 15 have been transposed, perhaps through an early scribal misunderstanding of ver. 16. "As thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee; thy dealing shall return upon thine own head" is the end of the judgment on Edom. The first half of the verse ushers in the second half of the prophecy.

We have a play upon words in ver. 7; for R.V. text see II Sam. 3: 21 (send away), for R.V. mg. Exod 6: 1 (let go, *i.e.* drive out). The former is what one would expect from one's confederates; the latter is the grim reality. N.E.B. brings it out.

The imperatives in ver. 12ff do not look to the future. Just as in the prophetic perfects of vers. 2, 6f the prophet is transported to the future and sees the doom already completed, so here he is transported into the past and speaks as though the Edomite hostility against Jerusalem had not yet taken place.

The Day of the Lord (vers. 15a, 16–21).

For the general concept of the Day of the Lord see ch. II. The drinking in ver. 16 is the drinking of the cup of God's wrath, of which Judah and Israel ("ye") have already drunk.

There is probably some textual corruption in ver. 19f, for as it stands it would seem to deprive the restored of Israel of part of their territory (both vers. 18 and 20 imply Israel's restoration); in ver. 20 quite apart from our ignorance of the location of Sepharad and why it should be specially mentioned, the Hebrew is very difficult.

Though Obadiah may seem preoccupied with the restoration of Israel, the closing words of the prophecy show that he knew that all this was to come to pass merely that the kingdom of God should be established.