

**THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO.  
AN  
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY  
OF OBADIAH, A DISSERTATION**

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the university of Chicago. An introduction to the study of Obadiah, a dissertation by George A. Peckham

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The University of Chicago

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# AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF OBADIAH

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE DIVINITY SCHOOL  
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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

(DEPARTMENT OF OLD TESTAMENT LITERATURE AND INTERPRETATION)

BY

GEORGE A. PECKHAM



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TO  
MY WIFE







## AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF OBADIAH

Obadiah, the shortest of Old Testament books, offers for solution an unusual number of difficult problems. There has been, and still is, great diversity of opinion regarding the date of the oracle and the circumstances that occasioned it. Is the prophecy as we have it a unit? If not, how is it to be divided? Are vs. 1-7 a record of history, or a prediction, or a "prophetic estimate" of events that were just taking place at the time when the message was delivered? Difficulties in syntax, lexicography, and history confront the student in almost every verse.

At the beginning of our study we are met by the striking resemblance between Obad., vs. 1-9 and parts of Jer. 49:7-22. Obad., vs. 1-4 and 5, 6 have so much in common with Jeremiah that there can be no thought of independent origin for the two pieces. Either Jeremiah borrowed from Obadiah or Obadiah from Jeremiah, or both must be indebted to an older common source, or both have been annotated and increased by the same hand. From a careful comparison of the two texts it appears that in Obadiah the arrangement of the verses is the logical one and that the prophecy as a whole is here in its more original form; but occasionally Jeremiah offers the better reading: for example, the superiority of Jer. 49:9 over Obad., vs. 5; and Jer. 49:15<sup>b</sup> over Obad., vs. 2<sup>b</sup>, is evident. The present form of vs. 2 of Obadiah is due to textual corruption and that of vs. 5 to interpolation. But it is unnecessary to enter here upon an extended discussion of the relation of Obadiah to the parallel passage of Jeremiah, for an excellent presentation of the material may be found in the article on "Obadiah" by J. A. Selbie, in *Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible*. See also the Introductions of Kuenen, Driver, and Cornill.

The position of many scholars, stated by Kuenen (*Einleitung*), is that both have followed the same original, of which Jeremiah has made free use, while Obadiah has taken it over with very slight changes (Ewald, Wildeboer, Briggs, Driver, J. A. Selbie, and others). Hitzig in supposing that Jeremiah served as a model for Obadiah has had few followers. Wellhausen, Nowack, and Marti, who, with Stade, Smend, and Schwally, consider the piece from Jeremiah to be a very late production, maintain that its author borrowed directly from our book which, according to their theory, has suffered corruptions and received additions after his use of it. The arguments offered for this position seem valid.

This short book has passed through its full share of changes, which

will be noticed below. For the possibilities in the way of displacement, transposition, interpolation, glosses, and corruption of text compare the 𐤀𐤏 of I Kings, chaps. 2-14, with the text of the LXX. To take a single example, between vs. 35 and 36 of chap. 2 there is found in the LXX a section which corresponds to 5:9, 10; 3:1b; 5:29; 9:24, 25, 23, 17, 18 of the 𐤀𐤏. Every student of Old Testament textual criticism knows that many other passages would serve equally well for illustration.

Before the appearance of Ewald's commentary, the unity of the book of Obadiah was generally accepted without question; although some saw that the last few verses had little to do with the rest of the prophecy, and gave them a purely messianic interpretation. Drusius, in his commentary (1594), says, on vs. 17, "What follows refers to the deliverance of the church and the reign of Christ," and Tarnovius in 1624 gives vs. 17-21 a spiritual application to the church and her enemies; but Ewald was the first to suggest that a prophet living in the exile had made use of an older oracle as the foundation of his own message of comfort to his people. According to Ewald, more than half of the present piece, vs. 1-10, 15-18, in subject-matter, language, and style, points to one or more older prophets. Little if any change has been made in vs. 1-10. It is not certain, however, that vs. 15-18 constituted a part of this older oracle against Edom: in them our prophet may have used more than one source. Vss. 11-14 and 19-21 are his own composition, dating soon after the capture of Jerusalem by the Chaldaeans. The historical background may be seen in a corrected reading of II Kings 16:6 and in Obad., vs. 7. Rezin has conquered the territory east of the Jordan down to Elath, expelling the Jews and restoring the city to the Edomites. The latter, however, are obliged to tolerate the rule of their Aramean allies, which leads to bloody quarrels between them and their friends and protectors, so that many of the most distinguished Edomites are banished from the country. This furnishes Obadiah, a contemporary prophet in Jerusalem, an occasion for pronouncing Yahweh's judgment upon the pride of Edom (*History of Israel*, English transl., Vol. II, pp. 159 f.).

Ewald's treatment, dividing the prophecy into an older and a younger portion, was a distinct advance, pointing the way to the solution of many difficulties in the Book of Obadiah. He has been closely followed by Kuenen, who is not so definite in the date of the older piece, and who has with slight variation from Ewald's position fixed the point of division at the end of vs. 9, and the date of the younger prophet some time after the return from the captivity in 536. In substantial agreement with him are Cornill, Wildeboer, Driver, Selbie in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*, and others.

Koenig (*Einleitung*) differs somewhat from Kuenen, inasmuch as he considers 16a, 18, 19a, 20b parts of the pre-exilic piece.

The principal reasons offered for the partition are: (1) The enemies of Edom in vss. 1-9 are the nations who are aroused by Yahweh to execute vengeance upon their former friend and ally, whereas according to vss. 15 ff., the judgment proceeds from Yahweh, and Israel is the instrument for its execution. (2) Vss. 1-9 represent Edom's chief sin as his pride and defiance of Yahweh himself because of reliance upon his stronghold, while in the latter part of the book the punishment is visited solely because of his treacherous conduct against his brother nation, Judah. (3) The literary style of the two parts is entirely different. The first, abounding in striking figures, rich in thought, and concise in statement, is full of life and action; but the second, in marked contrast, is lacking in ideas, as well as vigor of expression.

Wellhausen made a valuable contribution to the solution of the problem, when he established the main division in vs. 15. Vss. 6, 7d-9, 12, he considers as secondary, and sees the occasion for the remainder of vss. 1-14, 15b in the driving of the Edomites out of their home by the Arabian tribes of the south some time after the first half of the fifth century B. C. Vss. 15a, 16-21 were added at a still later date not definitely fixed. Wellhausen's position has been accepted by the commentators, Nowack and Marti, also by Cheyne in the *Encyclopaedia Biblica*. In vss. 1-7 Wellhausen and Nowack see not prediction, but a record of past events; while Marti thinks of history in the making, "a prophetic estimate of Edom's conquest being enacted in the present." G. A. Smith grants Wellhausen's claim that the seventh verse of Obadiah refers to the expulsion of the Edomites by the Arabs in the sixth or fifth century B. C., but maintains the pre-exilic origin of vss. 1-6. "Vss. 8-9 form a difficulty," because they return to the future tense. Smith sees no difficulty in the way of dating the remainder of the book in the years following the destruction of Jerusalem, and thinks it not improbable that the prophet was an eye-witness of that awful time. Among those who have followed Ewald's lead in dividing the book into an older and a younger portion, but who have proposed decidedly unique treatments, may be mentioned Winckler, *Allorientalische Forschungen*, zweite Reihe, Band III (1900), pp. 425-57, and Sievers. Winckler brings the older piece, which consists of vss. 1-18, with the exception of the last clause of vss. 11, 13, 17b, into connection with an unsuccessful revolt of Jerusalem under Darius, at which time he supposes that Jerusalem was destroyed by the Edomites, Moabites, and Ammonites, under orders from the Persian king as a punishment for participation in