

ALIENS—SIN—RESPONSIBILITY

This time it is the writing of Obadiah, the prophet. Of Obadiah himself we know very little. This is no great drawback. It was not what the prophets were in themselves that made them important to us, it was the communication of which they were the mediums. God made use of insignificant men often, on the principle defined by Paul in writing to the Corinthians concerning the spiritual light in the apostles:

*"We have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be (manifestly) of God and **not of us.**"*

It is the vision of Obadiah—what he saw. God speaks of *"the foolish prophets that follow their own spirit and have seen nothing"* (Ezek. 13:3).

"Yea, they are prophets of the deceit of their own heart"
(Jer. 23:26).

The prophets, without inspiration, were no more than other men, and, therefore, could see nothing in *"their own spirits"* but those fortuitous combinations of ideas and imaginations which are natural to all men and profitable to none for guidance in the things of righteousness or futurity. What God causes a man to see by the action of inspiration is another thing. We may then see something with him that is of advantage to us to know.

This vision of Obadiah differs somewhat from the visions of the other prophets. It is brief, but that is no great detriment. Much may be said in few words. It is in its topic that it principally differs. The messages of the prophets as a rule relate to Israel, and we are directed either to the reproof of Israel's wanderings or the delineation of Israel's future. But Obadiah has to do with an alien nation.

"Thus said the Lord God concerning Edom."

We all know who Edom was. It was a community descended from Esau, the brother of Jacob, for whom Edom was another name. Though a son of Isaac, he was not beloved of God, but otherwise.

"Jacob have I loved; Esau have I hated."

To men who judge the matter from a merely natural point of view, this seems strange. Of the two men, judged from this point of view, Esau seems the more lovable of the two:

"Esau was a skilful hunter, a man of the field and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents."

Esau was what people would consider a more manly, frank, and interesting character; Jacob was his mother's boy, and appears in the light of what might seem overreaching and underhanded. Why should one be loved and the other hated? We get the clue in that divine saying:

"I love them that love Me."

Jacob was a lover of his father's God; Esau was a mere lover of nature. This was a great difference, and continues to this day, the great distinction between men that are godly and men that are not. And it constitutes the ground of aversion between one class and the other; for there is a fundamental aversion that is almost mutual between those who love God and those who love the present evil world. The love of the present world is due to the exclusive action of the mind of the flesh, or the mind generated by the unenlightened brain left to itself; the love of God is due to the enlightenment of the natural mind by the Spirit of God in revelation. Hence the explanation given by Paul of the antagonism between Isaac and his brother Ishmael:

"He that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit; even so it is now."

The two states are mutually repellent on the natural principle universally illustrated in society that people who love different things do not love one another. If this principle operates where there are different natural loves, it operates more powerfully where spiritual love comes into the process. The world hates those who love God, because it has no love for God. Jesus said it would be so:

"If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, therefore the world hateth you."

He said also in prayer to the Father,

"I have given them Thy Word, and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world."

Again Paul says:

"We, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise."

Obadiah, then has to deal with the descendants of a man who was not in the covenant of promise, and to whose posterity God had assigned a district to the southwest of the land of promise, consisting of rocky valleys and precipitous places. Concerning this community—active, predatory, zealous, and prosperous, Obadiah speaks. What had he to say? Words of *"lamentation and mourning and woe."* Destruction and desolation are foreshown for reasons given.

"Thou shouldest not have" done this; "thou shouldest not have" done that. "Thou shouldest not have rejoiced over the children of Judah in the day of their destruction. Thou shouldest not have stood in the crossway to cut off those of his that did escape; thou shouldest not have spoken proudly in the day of their distress."

Well, why lay stress on those things? There is a reason. It is written in the prophet Amos concerning Israel.

"You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore, I will punish you for all your iniquity."

From this it might seem as if God would have no punishments for any other. But here in Obadiah is a case of punishing for their iniquity a nation whom God did not *"know"* as He knew Israel. And it is far, far from the only case. In the very prophet Amos, in which we read—

*"You only have I known," we read, "for three transgressions of **Damascus**, and for four, I will not turn away from the punishment thereof . . . for three transgressions of **Gaza**, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof . . . for three transgressions of **Tyrus**, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof."*

All these were *"families of the earth"* whom God had not *"known"* as He had known Israel: yet there is punishment for them. We should, therefore, reason wrongly if we were to infer from the statement in Amos, *"You only have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore I will punish you for all your iniquity,"* that God would not punish other nations. He expressly bars the way against this misinterpretation by sending Jeremiah to *"all the kingdoms of the world upon the face of the earth"* to say,

"Lo, I begin to bring evil on the city which is called by My name, and should ye be utterly unpunished? Ye shall not be unpunished, for I will call for a sword against all the inhabitants of the earth, saith Yahweh of Hosts."

Even the Canaanites, whom Israel succeeded in the land were examples of punishment for iniquity. Moses told Israel (Deut. 9:4) that—

"For the wickedness of those nations, Yahweh doth drive them out before thee—not for thy righteousness or the uprightness of thy heart."

In Leviticus 18, you may read a description of the wicked ways of the Canaanites. Israel is commanded (v. 24-25),

“Defile not ye yourselves in any of those things: for in all these things the nations are defiled which I cast out before you: and the land is defiled: therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it.”

The flood and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah are lessons to the same point. The statement, *“You only have I known”* is absolutely true both as to that fact and as to the special punishment growing out of it. It is the negative deduction from it that would be wrong. Israel has been punished as no other nation has because privileged as no other; but other nations are not unpunished. The principle regulating the dispensation of judgment is the simple and reasonable one affirmed by the Lord:

“To whom much is given, of them shall much be required.”

The principle has application in another direction, because the work of God has taken an individual after a national form. The individual salvation offered to Israel in the preaching of John and Jesus, and rejected by them, has been offered to the Gentiles instead, and along with it a call to *“all men everywhere to repent,”* and a *“revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds . . . in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ”* (Rom. 1:17-18; 2:5-6, 16). This operation develops a household of Christ, whose house, men continue to be so long as they *“hold fast the confidence and rejoicing of the hope steadfast unto the end.”* These have special privileges and will have special accountability to answer for; but some have reasoned that because this is true, therefore the rebellious among men who *“refuse him that speaketh,”* will have nothing to answer for in *“the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God”* if they should happen to be among the dead. This is a fallacy of the nature of the supposed mistake to which we have already referred, viz.,—that those would make, who should reason, that because God knew Israel only of all the families of the earth, therefore He would not punish the other families. It is a mistake made by some who have pushed true principles too far through failing to make allowance for other principles. It is not a mistake made by those who have remained in harmony with Dr. Thomas from the beginning. These have always recognised that the Truth creates responsibility wherever it understandingly comes, and that if men refuse the submission which God commands, they expose themselves to the terrors of the second death, naturally taking rank with the third class of the parable—additional to the faithful and unfaithful members of the household, whom the Lord describes as *“those mine enemies who would not that I should reign over them!”*

How terrible it will be in that day, if through looseness of doctrine in this matter on our part, men should find themselves awake from the dead to judgment who did not expect to be there, and who would naturally turn their reproaches against us. *“Why did you tell me I was not responsible?”* Paul declared himself *“free from the blood of all men,”* because he *“had not shunned to declare the whole counsel of God.”* In this position we can scarcely consider ourselves if we lull people into a deadly indifference by teaching them that if they choose to disobey God, the worst they have to look for is to be left undisturbed in an everlasting grave. This is not the worst. There is a judgment which shall *“devour the adversary”* of which every (responsible) soul of man will partake who are *“contentious, and do not obey the Truth, but obey unrighteousness”* (Rom. 2:8). This judgment is in *“the time of the dead”*—that is, the time of the awaking of the dead *“that they should be judged”*—not of those who, having no understanding *“shall not rise,”* but have passed away as the beasts that perish; but of those who, notwithstanding their contact with *“the light that is come into the world,”* loved darkness rather than light—and who, having heard the words of Christ as the acknowledged words of Christ and of God, and having rejected them practically in refusing to walk in accord with them, will be *“judged by them in the last day.”*

These are the solemn teachings of Christ and the apostles. The contrary doctrine is based upon too narrow a construction of "covenant-relationship." This relationship is more an affair of benefit than of accountability. Outside the covenant, there can be no eternal life; but everything shows that men need not be inside that covenant to be the objects of His righteous anger and punishment. We must not overlook the wide proprietorship of the Deity in all His works. If "*the cattle upon a thousand hills*" are His, much more the teeming millions of Adam's race. He is the "*God of the spirits of all flesh*," as Moses declared him to be. "*All souls are His*," as He Himself said by Ezekiel, "*soul of the son and the soul also of the father*." If He had not spoken to them, their being His would have done no more for them than it does for the beasts that perish; but He has spoken to them in their cast-off condition, and though few of them know the fact or are in illuminated relation with the fact, it does not lessen the terrible import of the fact to those who cast it knowingly aside and live indifferently to it as if man were his own maker and God's claims on him were nothing. There is very little sense on the earth at present of what is due to God. An outrageous theology and a false science have, between them, so emasculated and confused all reasonable ideas on the subject that it is one of the last things recognised, "*that God hath made all things for Himself, yea even the wicked for the day of his power*."

But let not us sleep as do others. We are not of the night but of the day. As such, it belongs to us to reflect the light of the day in advance. It may be to little purpose as regards others, but as regards ourselves, it is well-pleasing to God that while we sojourn in the land of the living, we should let the light shine, both in our manifest works and submission to God, and in our re-echo of the testimony that the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof; and that though, for a time, He tolerates the universal revolt against Himself, He will not always restrain His righteous anger, but will show Himself "*as a consuming fire against all unrighteousness of men, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He shall come to be glorified in His saints and admired in all them that believe*."

There may not seem to be much comfort in the exhibition of this phase of the Truth. Looked at all round, there is more than appears. There is nothing but comfort in the prospect of the effectual assertion and vindication and establishment of the authority of God in the earth. There can be no peace or joy or wellbeing till this is done. Part of the process consists of that great judicial inquisition which He has been pleased to appoint. He will root the wicked out of the earth, but not without showing cause. He will confound the arrogant and take the wise in their own craftiness, by exhibiting their folly to all men, as the fitting and effectual prelude to His own management of the earth. This He will do on the day which He hath appointed. This day, which is a terrible day, will only be terrible to the Lord's enemies. It will be a glorious day for those who love righteousness and hate iniquity, and who wait daily upon God in the patient continuance in well doing which He has required. The day of the ending of the present evil world will necessarily be a day of storm and trouble and clouds and thick darkness: but because of its presage of the everlasting day of light and love that lies beyond, it will be a day to be much hailed and much remembered by all the friends of God.

It is no unnatural association of terms in Isaiah that in the same breath describes "*the day of vengeance of our God*" as a day that will "*comfort all that mourn*" (Isa. 61:2). There can be no comfort to God's mourners till earth's transgressors have become the subjects of God's vengeance; for among the many causes of their mourning is this, that the transgressors lift the head on high, and to the wicked for the time being, the earth is given in undisturbed possession. Jesus asks the question,

“Shall not God avenge His own elect who cry day and night unto Him?”
(Luke 18:7).

A section of them are apocalyptically exhibited as ejaculating—

“How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?”

It is not an unscriptural prayer, therefore, to pray,

“O God, to whom vengeance belongeth, lift up Thyself, Thou judge of the earth, Render a reward to the proud. Let not man prevail: let the heathen be judged in Thy sight. Put them in fear, O Lord, that the nations may know themselves to be but men.”

He will answer this prayer at the time appointed, *“though He bear long with them.”* Then will He at the same time *“comfort all (His own people) that mourn, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.”* Then will they exclaim, as it is written in the same chapter,

“I will greatly rejoice in the Lord: my soul shall be joyful in my God: for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation: He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels. For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all nations.”

Then will be fulfilled what is written in Obadiah:

“Upon Mount Zion shall be deliverance: and there shall be holiness, and the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions . . . and saviours shall come up on Mount Zion to judge the Mount of Esau, and the Kingdom shall be Yahweh’s.”

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Pages 456-461- By Bro. Robert Roberts