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Comments on the book of the Prophet Obadiah

Translated from French

by a not native English speaking person.

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FOREWORD

All Christians who are truly submitted to the word of God cannot be mistaken as to the future of the religious world around them. They know that Christendom is striding towards the final apostasy and the reign of the Antichrist; thus, sensing the gravity of their witness amidst this growing moral ruin, they have an ever-increasing duty to hold fast to ‘the simplicity of Christ’ (2 Cor. 11:3), the doctrine which a faithful soul, taught by the Spirit of God, must preserve as coming from Him, in contrast to the teachings of men.

Regarding this teaching, a child of God, unaccustomed to scientific studies—which, moreover, would more often obscure than enlighten his understanding of the Holy Scriptures—is soon convinced, whilst studying the Bible, that the only key to opening and understanding it is the text itself, the full text, taught, received and understood by the Holy Spirit. Palaeontology, ethnography, scientific explorations and the discoveries they yield, historical research—in short, all branches of science, however interesting they may be—do not shed light on

the Word of God. Whilst they may sometimes confirm it, they can never, for a single moment, undermine its value in the eyes of the Christian. When scientific discoveries support the truths handed down to us ‘with full certainty’ by the Holy Scriptures, the believer rejoices to see the objections to the sacred texts, raised by unbelievers, refuted; however, despite the help they may offer him in the struggle, they are never for him the indispensable commentary for understanding the Holy Book, but, rather, they often become a real obstacle to understanding it. Here is why: men of science tend to reduce knowledge of the Bible to the level of what human reason can accept. Even when they do not go so far as to embrace rationalism proper—from which, however, by virtue of his studies, even the most orthodox theologian, the most sincere in his faith, cannot entirely escape—they introduce a rational element into biblical interpretation.

We in no way dispute science’s rightful domain. We do not underestimate the value of the sciences or purely scientific disciplines, which are excellent in their own right. We hold scientific methods in high regard, provided they do not presume to con-

trol and judge God's revelation in the Holy Scriptures. The Christian is infinitely indebted, in particular, to the various men of science who have devoted themselves to editing the sacred texts well, to translating them accurately, and to gaining a better understanding of the languages in which their originals were written. He gratefully accepts certain insights that ordinary biblical exegesis offers in the service of the faith; but he has but one certain source: the Scriptures; and but one resource for understanding them: the Spirit of God. For the Christian, it is the Spirit alone who knows the things of God, who teaches and communicates them, who enables them to be received and understood, independently of all human knowledge; it is He alone, finally, who enables us to expound them.

The danger of the rationalist tendency is glaringly obvious when it comes to prophecy. Men, guided by human reasoning, are compelled to acknowledge in the prophets the foretelling of historical events before they come to pass, and this fact is for them the most astonishing expression of what they call inspiration; but they have scarcely any inkling of a prophetic vision of the end times, and if they do admit it, it is to attribute to the

prophets a messianism ‘more or less clear, depending on the times in which they lived’, or the announcement of a vague ‘reign of God’, the gradual result and final triumph of Christianity over paganism in the world. This is how they usually interpret the reign of God. They refuse to see that the Word teaches us exactly the opposite, showing us that the coming of the Lord to take His Church into heaven will bring an end to Christianity on earth, and that apostate Christendom, left behind here, will become the great Babylon, the mother of an idolatry all the more abhorrent for being grafted onto the Christian trunk. The pagan nations will therefore not be converted by Christianity; but, on the other hand, a multitude of them will receive the Gospel of the Kingdom (which is not the Gospel of grace) through the ministry of the future Jewish Remnant.

These same men see in the Old Testament prophecies events that have now been fulfilled, so that, for them, history explains prophecy: this is a grave error. We in no way deny that there is a partial historical fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies (and this is indeed what distinguishes them from those of the New Testament, which immediately introduce us to the end

times), but this partial fulfilment is never the final word of prophecy, for that would be, as the apostle says, to give it ‘a particular interpretation’ (2 Peter 1:20). It is a basic principle in the study of prophecy that, whilst it often has a partial fulfilment in the past, it does not ‘interpret itself’. Its meaning is not to be found in an isolated passage bearing within itself its own solution. It can only be understood according to the mind of the Spirit of God who dictated it through the mouth of ‘God’s holy men’. Whilst it speaks to us of what is now the past, it never stops there, and points out in coming events only analogies with things to come. Whatever perspective it opens up before us, prophecy always leads to Christ. It proclaims ‘the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ’ (2 Peter 1:16). By revealing in advance ‘the sufferings that were to be Christ’s portion’, it proclaims ‘the glories that will follow’. And, since judgments are part of Christ’s glories, prophecy reveals them to us as well: they make his righteousness known to the inhabitants of the world (Isaiah 26:9).

In saying this, we do not claim to have defined the scope of prophecy, but to have shown where it always leads. Indeed, the

prophet begins by noting the moral state of Israel (and, in the New Testament, of the Church of Christ); and highlights its total and irremediable ruin, despite the urgent calls urging it to repentance; he announces the judgments that will befall this people in the present and in the future, and the final restoration of a faithful Remnant under the glorious sceptre of Christ. As for the nations, to whom God has entrusted power following the failure of his people and whom he uses as a rod against them, the prophet points to their impending judgement, in order to encourage the faith of the faithful; but, as the restoration of Israel will only take place during the glorious reign of the Messiah, the judgement of the nations will only be fully accomplished upon the establishment of that reign.

Prophecy must therefore culminate, as we have said, in the power and coming of Christ in his kingdom. The kingdom is indeed its specific aim. It is not, as in Christianity, the revelation of God's heavenly counsels concerning the Church, but that of his kingdom here on earth and the ways by which He will bring it about. This is so true that even the prophet Amos, who, more than any other prophet, speaks only of events that

are near and imminent—his subject being the ways of God’s present government towards mankind—Amos, I say, brings these ways to a head on the day of the Lord (Amos 9:11–15). He certainly mentions the latter briefly, in a few verses, but this is enough to prove to us that the glorious reign of Christ is the ultimate goal contemplated by the prophet.

The same applies to the prophet Obadiah, the subject of this study. The final words of his short prophecy are: ‘The kingdom shall be the Lord’s.’ But Obadiah also displays a characteristic common to most prophets, except Amos. A past event serves merely as a foreshadowing and a prelude to future events. One need only compare Edom in the first chapter of Amos with that in Obadiah to be convinced of this. Amos foretells, concerning Edom (1:11, 12), events that took place less than two centuries after his prophecy, and goes no further. Obadiah, contemplating an event that has just taken place—the capture of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar—sees in it an analogy with the role of Edom in the end-time events that will precede the definitive establishment of Christ’s reign.

This latter fact is categorically denied by the commentators we have mentioned, their reason objecting to the reappearance on the world stage of nations that today seem completely extinct. That is why, we repeat, the thoughts of God, contained in His Word, and prophecy in particular, are inexplicable to human reason. Therefore, the simple are blessed, for it is said of them: ‘The entrance of thy words giveth light, giving understanding unto the simple’ (Ps. 119:130). Let them therefore allow themselves to be taught by the Word, and seek only in it—and in it alone—the light to understand it: ‘In your light we see light’ (Ps. 36:9). Let them not even seek, through the sciences, to fill the apparent (but by no means real) gaps in the Word of God, or to supplement that over which the Scriptures have remained silent. When God speaks, let them say, as Samuel did: ‘Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening’ (1 Sam. 3:9); and when God is silent, let them say with the Psalmist: ‘Set a guard over the entrance to my lips’ (Ps. 141:3). Perhaps God will reveal to them the reason for His silence, when their trust in Him has been tested, and they will then find, in that very silence, new instructions. Finally, let them not seek to know everything, or

to explain everything at once. The riches of Christ are communicated to us gradually through the Holy Spirit, who reveals God to us in His Word. The miner, following a gold vein, gathers its yield gradually. To acquire much, he must not lose sight of the precious vein which, in a moment of inattention, might escape his notice. One day, it is true, the haul will be small; another day, the discovery of a rich ingot will fill the miner with joy; but whether he discovers little or much, it is always the same precious metal, whose full value will be revealed at the end of the mining operation. It is the same for us when we apply ourselves to studying the Word under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. By never losing sight of Christ, we shall not go astray. We shall always make some new discovery of His glories. Some will be of a broader nature than others, for the glories of Christ may be heavenly or earthly, but both contribute to forming the incomparable crown that God intends one day to place upon the head of His Beloved, when He enters His reign as the Son of Man, King of Israel, King of the nations and King of glory.

Edom: its past, present and future

‘Esau is Edom.’ So it is stated three times in chapter 36 of Genesis. The character of this nation was passed on to it by its father in indelible traits. Let us see what this consists of.

Esau did not acquire the name Edom at his birth. God wished to illustrate through him, as the firstborn of Rebekah’s twins, one of the great principles of His government. This principle was that of God’s free choice according to the election of grace. That is why God did not grant the birthright to Esau, the firstborn, but bestowed it upon Jacob by His determined purpose and sovereign decree. This revelation of God’s choice was made neither to Jacob, nor to Esau, nor even to their father Isaac, but to Rebekah, who, before the birth of her sons, had gone to consult the Lord (Gen. 25:22). It was then that God said to her: ‘The older shall serve the younger.’ This statement in no way constitutes a curse pronounced against Esau, for, before they were born, neither of these children had ‘done anything good or bad’ (Rom. 9:11); but God was thus asserting His right to choose the heirs of the promise. The curse was only

pronounced against Esau when, in the course of its long history, Edom had rejected all calls of grace (Mal. 1:3). At first, God took from Esau only the authority over his brother and the right to the inheritance; He did not deprive him, even after his profane act, of the incidental blessings. That is why Isaac, whilst retaining, against his desires and his will, the birthright for Jacob, also blessed Esau, his brother. ‘By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come’ (Heb. 11:20). Esau still retained a real blessing, albeit of far lesser value than his brother’s: ‘His dwelling was to be in the fatness of the earth, and in the dew of the heavens above. He was to live by the sword and serve his brother’, for what was promised to Jacob—‘Rule over your brothers’—could not be revoked. Yet the patriarch added: ‘When you become a nomad, you will break his yoke from your neck’ (Gen. 27:39, 40).

This prophecy of Isaac was fulfilled. The sword has always dominated the history of Edom. It is by the sword that he seizes the mountain of Seir and exterminates the Horites who inhabited it before him (Gen. 36:21); he battles continually with the sons of Israel and even with his immediate neighbours, such as

Moab. By the sword he finally broke the yoke of Judah and freed himself from it ‘to this day’ (2 Kings 8:20–22); by the sword he later plundered Jerusalem and took the captives of Judah (Ps. 137:7; Amos 1:11); finally, by the sword, he extended his territory at the expense of Judah and Simeon, for in the long run, driven by his hatred and ambition, he sought ‘to take the land of the Lord as his own possession’ (Ezek. 36:5). Hence the name Edom, a region extending well beyond the mountain of Seir (Mark 3:7).

Esau is therefore Edom, but not in the first chapter of his story. He acquired this name when he showed himself to be profane regarding his birthright (Heb. 12:16), which he believed belonged to him (for, I repeat, God’s decree had been revealed only to Rebekah) and which had not yet been taken from him by Jacob’s trickery. ‘For a single meal’ he sold this right, despised God’s gift, and preferred the momentary satisfaction of a carnal need. Thus he deprived himself of the blessing and was rejected, not because of his birth, but because of his contempt for divine gifts (Heb. 12:17); and it was then that he received

the name Edom, an allusion to the words: ‘Let me have some of that red stew’ (Gen. 25:30).

From that moment on, Esau’s profane attitude characterised the nation descended from him, a nation that despised the sons of Israel and the God who had made them the objects of his promises. Another trait was added to the first. Esau’s anger flared up against Jacob, whose cunning had taken advantage of his indifference to God’s gift. This anger degenerates into a murderous hatred. “And Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him. And Esau said in his heart, ‘The days of my father’s mourning are approaching, and I will kill my brother Jacob’” (Gen. 27:41). These murderous designs, reminiscent of Cain’s towards Abel, were thwarted by the prolongation of Isaac’s life, whose death was, in Esau’s eyes, the limit beyond which he was willing to postpone his vengeance. This also explains why Esau’s hatred did not find vent when the two brothers met after crossing the ford of Jabok, and why he even concealed it beneath a generous façade, despite the unsettling presence of his four hundred men-at-arms and his ambiguous offer to leave some of them with his brother

(Gen. 32:6; 33:15). The two brothers were one hundred and twenty years old when they buried Isaac, who was one hundred and eighty years old (Gen. 35:27–29). From then on, being unable to live together because of their numerous flocks—further proof of God’s providential care, which thus delivered Jacob from a perpetual threat—Esau had to go to the land of Seir, far from his brother Jacob (Gen. 36:8). However, even before this time, he had already been living in a part of the flat country that extended on various sides into the plain (Gen. 14:6), and was called ‘the land of Seir, the country of Edom’ (Gen. 32:3; 33:1). Esau’s sons then took possession of the mountain of Seir, whose original inhabitants, the Horites, they either exterminated or enslaved (Gen. 36:20; 14:6). This people, whose name derives, as is well known, from Hor, meaning ‘cave’, were cave-dwellers. Edom, who succeeded them, made use of these dwellings hewn out of the rock, which still exist today (Jer. 49:16; Obad. 3). The mountain of Seir, also called in Obadiah ‘the mountain of Esau’ (Obad. 8, 9, 19, 21), situated between Elath, on the eastern shore of the Red Sea, and the southern tip

of the Dead Sea, thus became the main domain and, as it were, the homeland of Edom.

Esau's jealousy, hatred and thirst for vengeance were passed on to his descendants. Amalek was a direct descendant of Esau, being his grandson through Eliphaz (Gen. 36:12). His merciless hostility towards Israel erupted as soon as that people left Egypt to enter Canaan. Amalek is a terrifying type of Satan's hatred against God's people; thus the Lord declares that He will wage war against him from generation to generation (Ex. 17:16). At the time of his first attack, Amalek occupied part of the deserts of Paran and Shur, which block access to Palestine from the south. Once Israel had taken possession of its inheritance, the Lord waited until the time when Saul was anointed king to command him to destroy Amalek; but Saul spared Agag and the best of the sheep and cattle, and God sent Samuel to tell him: 'Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has also rejected you as king' (1 Sam. 15:9, 23). David, on the other hand, even before assuming the kingship, fought against Amalek and utterly destroyed them (1 Sam. 27:8–12; 30:1–20). This people was annihilated; in the time of Hezekiah, its territ-

ory, along with part of the hill country of Seir, was occupied by the tribe of Simeon (1 Chron. 4:42); but later, recaptured by Edom, it was incorporated into Idumea under Roman rule (Mark 3:7). In the Book of Esther, we witness, in the person of Haman, the implacable enemy of the Jews, Amalek's final effort to destroy God's people. This book is a type of the prophetic history of Israel in the end times (*). Thus we see Amalek reappear in the final confederacy of nations that band together against Israel (Ps. 83:7).

(*) See 'Meditations on the Book of Esther', by H. R.

The Edomites had leaders; they also had kings who 'reigned in the land of Edom before a king reigned over the sons of Israel' (Gen. 36:31–39). It was a king of Edom who refused passage to God's people (Judges 11:17).

Edom's belligerent nature, combined with its deep-seated hatred, brought it into constant conflict with Israel, and Israel's victories over it only served to heighten its thirst for vengeance and bloodshed. This perpetual wickedness met with its just reward. Saul defeated Edom (1 Sam. 14:47); David defeated it in

the Valley of Salt (1 Kings 11:15, 16; 2 Sam. 8:13, 14) and stationed garrisons in its land. On one occasion Edom allied itself with Israel and Judah, under Joram and Jehoshaphat, to wage war against Moab, an unnatural alliance which certainly did not benefit Israel. This same Edom (the Maonites of Mount Seir), allied with Moab and Ammon, later rose up against Judah, its former ally, and was destroyed by the Lord in the Valley of Beracah before Jehoshaphat and his people (2 Chron. 20:1, 10, 22). During the reign of Joram, the Edomites were defeated by this king, but they rebelled against his rule and chose a king for themselves once more (2 Kings 8:20). They retained their independence for half a century (2 Chron. 21:8); were defeated by the faithful Amaziah (2 Kings 14:7; 2 Chron. 25:11, 12); they rose up against Judah under the wicked Ahaz and became God's rod against him (2 Chron. 28:17).

Finally, taking their ceaseless hatred to the extreme, they allied themselves with Babylon and the enemies of the Jews during the days of the calamity of Judah and Jerusalem (Jer. 49; Ezek. 25:35; Ps. 137:7). Following this final transgression, the prophets pronounce a curse upon Edom (Isa. 34:9–11, 63:1–6; Jer.

49; Lam. 4:21; Ezek. 25:12–14; Amos 1), which in turn fell prey to Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian destroyer (Jer. 49:22; cf. 48:8, 32, 40). Such, according to Scripture, is the history of Edom in the past.

* * *

In the present, this history can be summed up in two words. Edom has vanished from the scene and no trace of it remains. It has been replaced, according to historians, by the Nabataeans, whom some believe to be the Nebaioth, descendants of Ishmael and related to Edom (Gen. 25:13; 36:3). Despite all the research and treatises of scholars, ‘few points in the ancient annals of the East remain, according to Lenormant, shrouded in such thick darkness’. We quote this remark to highlight the uncertainty of the much-vaunted historical science, in contrast to the absolute certainties presented to us by the biblical accounts. When it pleases God to remain silent, human wisdom goes astray. The history of the times preceding the creation of man is one of a thousand proofs of this; the history of Edom, within its framework so limited that it seems easy to take in at a glance,

is another. Having no competence to address these questions, however much interest they may present to human curiosity, and our sole aim being to edify the children of God regarding the self-sufficiency of Scripture, we confine ourselves to noting this gap. The Word teaches us that, in the past, a storm brought an end, at various times, first to the existence of the ten tribes, then to that of all the peoples who bordered Palestine, such as Edom, the Amalekites, Moab, Ammon and the Philistines. Of these nations, the last three, once destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, were and still seem to be, even today, occupied by the ‘sons of the East’, the Beni-Kedem, Arabs descended from Ishmael (Ezek. 25:1–11; Gen. 29:1; Job 1:3; Judg. 6:3, 33; 7:12; 8:10) whom Nebuchadnezzar had also conquered in the past (Jer. 49:28). All the peoples we have mentioned no longer occupy the world stage, but the word of God will teach us that, plunged into sleep and silence, they await the day of their national resurrection and that of their final judgement. That day will dawn, and, to prove it to us, we shall see the present dearth of information give way to authentic documents—authentic because they are divine—concerning the history of Edom in the

end times, a history which will occupy us in our study of the prophet Obadiah.

* * *

We have just seen that the believer possesses, regarding Edom's past, a certain document, the Book of God; and that, since God deliberately remains silent concerning this people's present, we are reduced, in their regard, to the uncertainty of human knowledge. Thus the simple believer will conclude that wisdom for him lies not in concerning himself with the present, about which God has revealed nothing to us, but in seeking in the Word what it reveals to us concerning the future. What, then, according to Scripture, is the future of Edom?

A remarkable detail: all the prophetic events of the last days are linked to a national resurrection of peoples and empires, so much so that one might almost say on this subject, as Paul did: 'Why is it considered incredible among you that God raises the dead?' This return to life will prepare the way for the final judgement of these nations, in view of the establishment of Christ's kingdom on earth, the only kingdom that will never be

shaken. Prophecy always has this earthly kingdom in view; the heavenly kingdom, into which the glorified saints and the Church will be brought, does not strictly fall within the prophetic domain, though it is by no means entirely excluded from it (see Rev. 4:5; 19–21); for the two spheres of the kingdom, the heavenly and the earthly, will be in constant communication with one another.

We therefore encounter, within the earthly realm of prophecy, a resurrection of the Roman Empire, once mortally wounded (Rev. 13:3; 17:8); a national resurrection of Israel (Ezek. 37); a resurrection of Assyria (Daniel 11:40–45 and the whole of Isaiah); a resurrection of all the nations, now extinct, and their final judgement in the Valley of Jehoshaphat (Ps. 83; Joel 3). Edom is among the latter (Joel 3:19).

Many commentators regard the idea of a national resurrection as a mistake stemming from the ‘literalism of a certain school’, whose prophetic views they dismiss as contrary to common sense. In fact, their opposition stems from the very way in which they view the Bible. It is, they say, a ‘collection of docu-

ments' subject to criticism as a 'historical science'; a dangerous assertion that undermines in advance the absolute and divine authority of Scripture. If 'all Scripture is divinely inspired' and forms part of the 'word of God' which is 'the truth', the truth will never be found on the side of those who presume to criticise that inspiration. For the simple believer, the whole question before us boils down to this: What does Scripture say? Does it speak clearly of the future of the world and the nations? If so, the Christian submits to its authority. But this authority is not enough for contemporary theology, which feels the need to verify it through the authority of science, thereby setting the latter up as the judge of God's thoughts. Faced with such a monstrous claim, the believer who has found eternal life in the Word of God, and whose life is sustained daily by that very Word—the believer, I say, pays no heed to the doubts and denials of this so-called 'science' and is content to draw truth from the Word of God.

The reappearance of the nations in the last days is intimately linked to that of the ten tribes of Israel, whose restoration seems just as, if not more, impossible than that of Edom. As for

the tribe of Judah, that immense multitude which today bears the indelible characteristics of its race amongst all the nations of the globe, countless passages from the prophetic writings show us that it will return to its land. But what has become of the ten tribes since their deportation by Shalmaneser, king of Assyria? (721 BC.) Vanished! Where, then? To which countries? Among which peoples of the earth? Complete obscurity! Research on this subject has, however, been plentiful: how many times were they thought to be on the verge of success... these hopes have been dashed. Neither in China nor in any of the countries to which God declares He will bring them back has the slightest trace of them been found. But God knows where they are hidden; He sees them and will find them. That is enough for us.

This restoration of the ten tribes, returning to their inheritance at the end of days, is presented to us in a multitude of passages in Scripture, of which we shall confine ourselves to citing just a few.

Speaking of the ten tribes, constantly referred to as Ephraim and Israel, the prophet Jeremiah says (chap. 31): ‘You shall again plant vineyards on the mountains of Samaria... for there is a day when the watchmen will cry out on the mountain of Ephraim: ‘Arise, and let us go up to Zion, to the Lord our God’” (vv. 5, 6). “O Lord, save your people, the remnant of Israel. Behold, I will bring them from the land of the North, and gather them from the ends of the earth.... all together, a great congregation: they shall return here. They shall come with weeping, and I will lead them with supplications; I will make them walk by streams of water along a straight path; they shall not stumble there; for I will be a father to Israel, and Ephraim shall be my firstborn’ (vv. 8, 9). ‘There is hope for your future,’ says the Lord (to Rachel, mother of Joseph), ‘and your sons will return to their own borders’ (v. 17). ‘I have heard Ephraim’s lament: “You have disciplined me, and I have been disciplined like an untamed calf; turn me, and I will be turned, for you are the Lord, my God’ (v. 18). Verses 21 to 26 of this same chapter describe the restoration of the captives of Judah; then

the reunion of the house of Israel with the house of Judah and the new covenant established with the whole people.

In Isaiah 49, the Lord says to the Messiah: ‘It is a small thing that you should be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the survivors of Israel.’ Then comes the moving description of their return to the land of their inheritance: ‘Behold, these shall come from afar; and behold, these from the north and the west, and these from the land of Sinim’ (vv. 6–13; 22–26).

Ezek. 20:34–38 describes the return of the ten tribes, quite different from that of Judah, who will be judged in their own land, whilst the rebels of Israel will be judged on the way, as the people who came out of Egypt were judged in the wilderness, and ‘shall not enter the land of Israel’.

Ezek. 37 speaks to us, through a striking image, of the future national resurrection of God’s people. “These bones are the whole house of Israel’ (v. 11), and thus also the ten tribes, that is to say Ephraim, whom the Lord gathers from all quarters and

brings into their land, so that ‘Judah and Joseph’ may once again become ‘one nation’ (vv. 16, 17, 21, 22).

Zech. 10 says: ‘I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of Joseph, and I will bring them back... and those of Ephraim shall be like a mighty man... I will whistle for them and gather them... and I will bring them back from the land of Egypt, and gather them from Assyria, and bring them to the land of Gilead and to Lebanon, and there will not be enough room for them’ (vv. 6–12).

Let us conclude these few quotations with the remarkable passage from Isaiah 11, which will serve as a transition to the reappearance of Edom in the last days on the prophetic stage. In verses 1 to 10 of this chapter, we find the portrait of the Messiah, coming in the fullness of the Spirit of God and introducing his millennial reign of peace here on earth. ‘And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set forth his hand a second time to recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinhar, and from

Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. And he will raise a banner before the nations, and gather the exiles of Israel, and bring together the scattered of Judah from the four corners of the earth” (vv. 11, 12). Then the two nations will be reunited as at the beginning of their history: ‘Ephraim will no longer be jealous of Judah, nor will Judah be an adversary to Ephraim’ (v. 13). This is therefore an entirely future scene. But now, with the awakening of Judah and the ten tribes, and their coming together as one, their former adversaries have also been roused: “They shall swoop down upon the Philistines from the west; together they shall plunder the people of the East: Edom and Moab shall fall into their hands, and the people of Ammon shall obey them” (v. 14).

This passage thus leads us to the reappearance of Edom in the last days. Let us quote, regarding the latter, the following passages:

Num. 24:17, 18. — Balaam announces that, in a future time, ‘a star shall come out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel’. This prophecy would have been fulfilled according to

Matt. 2:2, 7–10, had the people not crucified their Messiah. It will be fulfilled later, when Christ, once rejected, will restore his relationship with Israel and establish his reign on earth. Then what is told to us next will come to pass: ‘He shall pierce the corners of Moab, and destroy the sons of tumult. And Edom shall be a possession, and Seir shall be a possession... they, his enemies; and Israel shall act with power.’ Nothing of the sort has taken place to this day. Christ’s sceptre has not yet been raised; Israel has not yet acted with power and has not yet taken possession of Edom. This Edom, now vanished, must therefore be reborn to become ‘the prey of Israel’s hands’.

Ps. 108:7–11. — In this song of triumph, which could just as easily be placed in the mouth of the Messiah as in that of a restored Israel, the people being once again fully reunited (v. 8), the Psalmist exclaims: ‘Moab is the basin where I wash myself; upon Edom I have cast my sandal; over Philistia I will shout for joy... who will lead me to Edom?’ The answer is that it will be God, who had rejected the people and had not gone out with His armies. Thus, at the restoration of Israel, after its long re-

jection which still continues, Edom, along with all the neighbouring nations, will be conquered by the people of God.

Ps. 83:6–8. — This Psalm is clearly prophetic, as indeed are all the Psalms. The confederacy of nations referred to here, led by Edom, never came to pass (*). It is Edom, in fact, that is placed at the head of this coalition, whose aim is to ‘take possession of God’s dwellings’. Assyria joins them rather than leading them, for this Assyrian of the end does not seem to personally lead the first attack against Jerusalem, the first future siege of that city; he reserves himself for the final invasion, upon his return from Egypt, and it is then that he ‘will come to his end’ (Dan. 11:45). Nothing like this first siege has yet occurred in history. We have explained this elsewhere (**). What we note here is that Edom reappears at the end of time alongside nations, now destroyed like itself, which will seek to seize Jerusalem; for, apart from the presence of Edom, Nebuchadnezzar’s capture of Jerusalem bears no relation whatsoever to what is presented to us here.

(*) To give an idea of the difficulties faced by devout commentators who have failed to recognise the prophetic nature of the

Psalms, I quote one of them regarding this passage. ‘When has such a universal coalition ever occurred? One might hesitate between two periods: that of Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. 20) and that of the Maccabees (1 Macc. 5). Under Judas Maccabeus, the Jews did indeed have to fight against all the peoples surrounding them, including the Tyrians, who are otherwise never mentioned as being in a state of open hostility towards Israel (?). But, on the other hand, by that time, the Amalekites had long since been destroyed (1 Chron. 4:42, 43). Moab did not exist as a nation; furthermore, the mention of Assyria would be surprising at that time, since the empire of Nineveh had long since fallen, and if one were to try to take the name Assur as a designation for the kingdom of Syria, it would be difficult to understand why it was placed last (v. 9) as one of the least important. We therefore believe rather that this refers to the formidable invasion recounted in 2 Chronicles 20. This account, it is true, speaks only of the Moabites and the Ammonites, with whom Edom had joined forces. It is these peoples who, in our Psalm, appear to be the instigators of the raising of shields (v. 9). One would have to admit that their army included detachments of Ishmaelite and Amalekite nomads, and that the Philistines and Tyre, though not yet having taken up arms,

were preparing to join the coalition.” This sentence seems to us sufficient to condemn an entire system of interpretation which misunderstands the scope of the prophecy, seeks to adapt it to past events, and overlooks its ultimate purpose: the establishment of Christ’s reign in power through judgement.

(**) The Prophetic History of the Last Days and the Songs of Ascents, by H. R. (p. 31).

Isa. 34:1–8. — ‘The wrath of the Lord is upon all nations, and his fury against all their armies.’ This is the end of the age, the judgement preceding the reign of Christ (cf. v. 4 with Rev. 6:13, 14). In particular, it is the sword descending upon Edom, and ‘the sacrifice of Bozrah’, the destruction in Edom of the armies of the great western confederacy, a subversion like that of the first chapter of Genesis (cf. v. 11 with Gen. 1:2).

Isa. 63:1. — ‘Who is this coming from Edom, from Bozrah, in garments stained crimson? Who is this, resplendent in his attire, marching in the greatness of his strength? It is I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save.’ The Messiah appears here, coming from Edom, from Bozrah. It is He who executes vengeance, and ‘among the nations, no man has been with Him’

(note that Israel alone is exempted here). Can this passage be likened in any way to the past history of Edom? The judgments upon that nation have always been carried out by ‘the nations’; here they are carried out by the Lord Himself. Any attempt to spiritualise such a scene merely demonstrates an inability to simply receive the teaching of the Word. Edom will therefore be found at the end of time, when the Lord executes the terrible judgement that will place the reins of the kingdom in His hands.

Jer. 49:7. — In chapter 48, ‘the captives of Moab are restored by the Lord at the end of days’. Similarly in chapter 49:6, the sons of Ammon. Edom, however, will have no remnant, for, as we shall see in Obadiah, there will be ‘no remnant of the house of Esau’. Thus these three peoples will exist at the end of days to be judged, but the first two will not be utterly destroyed, whereas Edom will be.

Lamentations 4:21, 22. — The daughter of Edom will drink the cup, and her iniquity will be visited when the iniquity of the daughter of Zion has come to an end. These two events are

simultaneous, and one would have to be blind not to see that this refers to a future time, and that Jerusalem still bears her iniquity today and is trampled underfoot by the nations.

Ezek. 25:12–24. — Whilst Ammon and Moab are delivered into the hands of the sons of the East (this, as we have seen, is their past history), Edom, which has taken cruel vengeance on the house of Judah and has rendered itself most guilty towards it, will fall under the vengeance of the Lord, executed by the hand of His people Israel. Unable to fit this passage to history, commentators admit that this prophecy ‘extends to the last days. We shall then see the power of paganism, represented by Edom, crumble before the reign of Christ who comes from Judah’. (!) Such a way of commenting on Scripture carries within itself its own condemnation. Just as the Lord is seen, in Isaiah 34 and 63, exercising vengeance upon the armies gathered in Edom, without any help from the nations, and therefore in a manner entirely different from what He did in the past, so He will use Israel to exercise vengeance upon Edom itself.

Ezekiel 35 is of particular interest to the subject at hand, the re-appearance of Edom in the last days. This concerns the ‘time of the end’ when the sons of Israel will be delivered ‘into the power of the sword, in the time of their calamity’ (v. 5). Now, the entire prophecy reveals to us the apostasy of the Jews who have returned to their land in the last days, only to fall under the yoke of the Antichrist. At that time, Edom, as we have seen in Psalm 83, places itself at the head of the confederacy of nations which, aided by the future Assyrian, wish to ‘take possession of the dwellings of God’ (v. 12). Edom says: ‘The two nations and the two lands shall be mine, and we shall possess them’ (Ezek. 35:10). ‘They are desolate; they are given to us to devour’ (v. 12). We also know that at the time of this final effort by Israel’s enemies, the Lord manifests His glory before the eyes of the weak Remnant of Jerusalem, as a foretaste of the reign He is about to establish (Zech. 14:4), which leads the prophet Ezekiel to say to Edom: ‘You said: “The two nations shall be mine... and the Lord was there!”’ (v. 10). This makes Edom doubly guilty of its ‘perpetual enmity’, and so it is cut

off for ever: ‘When the whole earth rejoices, I will make you a desolation’ (v. 14).

Dan. 11:41. — When the king of the North, the Assyrian of the end, coming into conflict with Egypt (the king of the South) and invading the land of Israel, ‘Edom, Moab and the chief men of the sons of Ammon shall escape from his hand’. This prophecy has no connection whatsoever with present events. It suffices for us to quote it here, without further explanation, to demonstrate what we wish to prove, namely that these nations will survive the destruction of the Assyrian, the final act preceding the establishment of Christ’s kingdom (v. 45). All this is applied, by theologians who see in the prophecy nothing but the fulfilment of historical events, to a dubious expedition by Antiochus against Ptolemy Philometor!

Joel, whose prophecy deals solely with the ‘day of the Lord’ (*), that is to say, the day of the end, says: ‘Edom shall be a desolate wilderness, because of its violence against the sons of Judah, because they have shed innocent blood in their land. But Judah shall be inhabited for ever, and Jerusalem from genera-

tion to generation’ (3:19, 20). An entirely prophetic vision concerning the establishment of the kingdom, following the national judgement of the peoples in the Valley of Jehoshaphat.

(*) See ‘The Book of the Prophet Joel’, by H. R.

Mal. 1:3–5. — Here we come to the end of the history of Edom. When all the Lord’s attempts to bring him back have only stoked his hatred, God says: ‘I have hated Esau.’ Then God judges him definitively. Edom, in its perpetual rebellion, cries out: ‘We are destroyed, but we will rebuild what is ruined.’ Then, God’s patience having come to an end, God says, through the last prophet: ‘They will build, but I will tear down!’

* * *

All the quotations we have just given—which may have tried the patience of our readers—were necessary to prove, beyond any doubt, the future resurrection of Edom. Prophetic events are linked to this principle of the reappearance, in the end times, of nations long since vanished. May these explanations suffice to utterly destroy a whole system of prophetic interpret-

ation which distorts the word of God, disregards its authority, strips the events of the end of all significance, and ultimately turns eyes away from Christ and his glories, directing them instead towards past events of no moral significance for the heart or the conscience.

In addressing these lines to my brothers in Christ upon whom this system exerts its influence—for I am not speaking to rationalist scholars and unbelievers—I implore them to unlearn what they have learnt in that school and to return to the simplicity of faith in the absolute authority of Scripture. If they see clearly on a point as seemingly secondary as the one we have just considered, their eyes will be opened to other, more important matters, and they will be able to gauge the danger of applying human critical methods to the study of God’s Word. Alas! Already the most respectable among them do not hesitate to congratulate themselves that the doctrine of ‘literal inspiration has died a natural death in theological circles’. We reply to these brothers that, having abandoned the absolute inspiration of Scripture (for the word ‘literal’ is but a deception), their piety is no longer capable of effectively resisting the assaults of

modern unbelief. They lament this, but having allowed the blade of their sword—which is the word of God—to become blunted, they are left with nothing but a useless weapon when what they need is a double-edged sword.

* * *

This very long preamble allows us to address the prophecy of Obadiah. It will paint for us, in keeping with its scope, a picture of Edom's fate in the last days, and whilst we had to, in our Foreword, look far ahead to what we still have to say, the few verses of Obadiah will provide us with a means of verifying, in many respects, what we have just presented.

The judgments upon Edom and the nations: this is the theme of Obadiah. Let us not forget that these judgments are of immense importance for Israel's future. Whilst the Church is saved today by grace, Israel will, in the future, be delivered through these judgments. This is why the faithful remnant in the Psalms so often makes this the subject of its supplications. The constant parallels drawn by the prophets between past judgements and those yet to come help us to better understand the nature of the

latter. In turn, the future judgements direct our gaze towards the person of the Judge. The Remnant of Israel will recognise in Him the meek man whom they had once rejected, the Lamb of God who was delivered up for the sins of His people. With what delight the faithful will then behold, united in this august Person, majesty and grace, meekness and justice. ‘You are more handsome,’ they will say, ‘than the sons of men; grace is poured upon your lips; therefore God has blessed you for ever. Gird your sword upon your thigh, O mighty one, in your majesty and splendour; and, thriving in your splendour, drive your chariot forward, for the sake of truth, and kindness, and justice; and your right hand shall teach you terrible things. Your arrows are sharp—the peoples will fall before you—into the hearts of the King’s enemies!’ (Ps. 45:2–5.)

Obadiah

‘The vision of Obadiah. — Thus says the Lord God concerning Edom. We have heard a rumour from the Lord, and a messenger has been sent among the nations: “Arise! Let us rise up against him for war”’ (v. 1).

The word of God gives us no information about the person of the prophet Obadiah, nor about the exact time of his prophecy; any speculation on this matter is therefore pointless and cannot serve to edify souls. What God has revealed to us is what we ought to hold fast to; one cannot repeat this elementary truth too often, yet it is so little understood. If they put it into practice, God's children will be kept from bringing their own thoughts to the Word instead of allowing themselves to be taught by it. What would one think of a man who imagined he could add to the lake by emptying his jug into it? Would he not do better to come and fill it up? Can our own thoughts ever enrich the Scriptures? That Obadiah prophesied, like Jeremiah, towards the end of the kingdom of Judah, can be in no doubt to the Christian animated by 'the spirit of sound mind' (2 Tim. 1:7). One need only compare the judgement of Edom in Jer. 49:7–22 with the prophecy of Obadiah, which deals with the final ruin of that nation. Jeremiah uses almost the same words as our prophet: 'I have heard a rumour from the Lord, and a messenger has been sent among the nations: Gather yourselves together, and come against him, and rise up for war' (Jer. 49:14).

In the face of this analogy, and others which we shall see in the course of this meditation, commentators go to great lengths to determine which of these two prophets copied the other. This is a rather idle question, and one in which, as in any similar inquiry, it is not difficult to detect a critical spirit hostile to the full inspiration of the Word of God. The possibility of copying exists, but is this the only alternative to explain such a parallel? The same men ask the same question regarding the Synoptic Gospels; to what end have their investigations led? The human mind wears itself out over this, and it always ends in confusion. What the Christian is convinced of is that in Jeremiah, as in Obadiah, God speaks to him, and that he need only receive from Him the special instruction contained in each of these prophets.

There is a characteristic feature of the prophet Jeremiah to which no reference is made in Obadiah. Jeremiah foretells, in the near future, the destruction of Jerusalem, then of all the nations, by Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. 46–49), followed by the destruction of this great empire by the Lord Himself (chap. 50); finally, he identifies the instruments, the Medes, through whom

God will historically bring an end to this power (chap. 51). The prophet Daniel takes a different view: he describes the successive history of the four great world empires for as long as power is entrusted to the nations; yet he also shows the simultaneous fall of these powers to make way for the one kingdom ‘which shall never be destroyed’ (Dan. 2).

It is the second alternative that we find in Jeremiah. For him, the fate of all these empires is, from the outset, definitively determined by the fall of Babylon, for it has used the power that God placed in its hands for its own exaltation and the endless multiplication of its idols. Yet it is Babylon that executes God’s judgement upon all nations until the moment of its final downfall. From the moment of its historical fall, the prophet leads us through all the intervening centuries to the events of the last days. Thus, after describing the overthrow of Egypt by Nebuchadnezzar, Jeremiah tells us: ‘After this it shall be inhabited as in former days, says the Lord’ (46:26); and so, after the destruction of Moab by the same monarch, he adds: ‘I will restore the captives of Moab in the latter days’ (48:47); and likewise for the sons of Ammon: ‘After this, I will restore the cap-

tives of the sons of Ammon’ (49:6). Finally, concerning Elam, destroyed by that same sword of Babylon: ‘It shall come to pass, in the latter days, that I will restore the captives of Elam’ (49:39).

The situation is not quite the same for Edom (49:7–22). It will never be restored; such is its final sentence. Thus, whilst describing its judgment by Nebuchadnezzar, who ‘soars like an eagle and flies, and spreads his wings over Bozrah’ (cf. 48:40), the Spirit of God brings us face to face with the end-time events accompanying its downfall. Hence the striking analogy between Jeremiah and Obadiah. In both cases, Edom’s end in the last days—its overthrow with no possibility of restoration—will be wrought by its former allies; by the nations gathered against it and upon its territory; by the Lord Himself (if I correctly interpret the ‘lion rising from the flood of the Jordan’ (49:19, cf. 50:44), things we find in these two parallel prophecies; and finally by the people of Israel, a fact we do not encounter in Jeremiah, but in Obadiah.

Let us see to what circumstance the first verse of Obadiah alludes. No historical event corresponds to what we read there, but Psalm 83 speaks to us, as we have already seen in discussing the future of Edom, of a future confederation of the peoples surrounding the territory of Israel. Edom is at their head. The future Assyrian, the Gog of the prophecy, supports and encourages, if not personally, this plot aimed at exterminating God's people. 'Come,' they say, 'let us destroy them so that they are no longer a nation and the name of Israel is no longer mentioned' (v. 4). 'They have said: "Let us take possession of the dwellings of God"' (v. 12). In this period of the last days, Israel, having returned to its land, will become the object of covetousness for all the nations. The king of the North, leader of the Assyrian confederacy—in other words, Gog or Russia—will use this coalition to carry out his designs against Jerusalem. Outwardly, and as their professed aim, Edom and its allies 'serve as the arm of the sons of Lot', that is to say, Ammon and Moab, whose interests they appear to embrace and champion through this joint aggression. But Edom, consumed by ambition and hatred, sets his own mind on laying claim to the

Lord's inheritance. He says: 'The two nations (Judah and Israel) and the two lands shall be mine, and we shall possess them.' 'They are desolate,' he says again of the mountains of Israel, 'they have been given to us to devour' (Ezek. 35:10, 12). The first siege of Jerusalem and its partial success (Zech. 14:1, 2) seem to prove Edom right (*). It is then that a reaction arises against its haughty claims amongst the allied nations, who unmask them. 'The rumour is from the Lord' who, according to the word of Zechariah, 'will make Jerusalem a cup of staggering to all the surrounding peoples' and 'a heavy stone for all the peoples' (Zech. 12:2, 3). Edom's allies send 'an envoy among the nations' to urge them to rise up in war against Edom, assuring them of their support: 'Rise up, and let us rise up against him.' Which nations are these? We know from the prophecy that the Assyrian of the end, after seizing Palestine, seeks to subjugate it; that the Jews, the apostate people of the Antichrist, make a pact with the Western empire (the Beast and the ten kings) to resist this invasion (Isa. 28:14–22) ; that during this time the Assyrian, sweeping like a storm over Egypt, first enters 'the land of beauty' (Palestine), 'whilst Edom and

Moab and the chief men of the sons of Ammon escape from his hand' (Dan. 11:41). These three nations that escape him are precisely those that pursue their own interests to his detriment and seek to thwart his designs on the Holy Land. But, as we have just seen, their alliance does not last long. All turn against Edom, which had placed itself at their head, and to ward off the danger posed by its ambition, they seek support among the nations by offering them an alliance: 'Arise, and let us rise up against him for war.' This plan appears to succeed.

(* See on this subject 'The Prophetic History of the Last Days',
by H. R.

'Behold,' says the Lord to Edom, 'I have made you small among the nations; you are greatly despised. The arrogance of your heart has deceived you, you who dwell in the clefts of the rock, your lofty dwelling; you who say in your heart: "Who will bring me down to the ground?" Though you soar like the eagle and make your nest among the stars, I will bring you down from there, says the Lord. If thieves, if night-time plunderers were to come to you (how ruined you are!), would they steal more than they need? If grape-gatherers were to come to

you, would they not leave some gleanings? ‘How Esau has been searched out! How his hidden things have been laid bare!’ (vv. 2–6). Jeremiah expresses himself in similar terms (49:15, 16 and vv. 9, 10). The devastation is complete, the plundering organised so as to leave nothing to this arrogant nation that trusted in its inaccessible territory.

‘All your allies have driven you to the border; those who were at peace with you have deceived you, they have prevailed against you; those who ate your bread have set a trap for you’ (v. 7).

Just as Edom is on the verge of achieving its goal of annexing Israel’s inheritance, its allies turn against it and ‘drive it to the border’, which I believe means that it is pushed back to the very limits of its own territory. There he encounters the armies of the West, notoriously raised to oppose Edom’s occupation of Jerusalem, but just as resolutely opposing this occupation by Ammon, Moab and Assyria. Thus ‘Jerusalem becomes a cup of staggering to all the surrounding peoples’ (Zech. 12:2).

The territory of Edom is, at that time, a strategic point of the utmost importance for opposing Gog (the Assyrian), who has just swept down upon Egypt like an overflowing torrent (Dan. 11:40–43), for Edom is not confined, as we noted above, to the ‘mountain of Seir’, but also includes the territories of Idumea, the occupation of which by the armies of the West will cut off the Assyrian’s return from Egypt to Palestine, whether along the Mediterranean coast or via the Sinai Peninsula. The plan of the armies of the West may be wisely conceived, but they have reckoned without the Lord. It is He who, unbeknownst to them, has gathered them in Edom to destroy them. ‘His wrath is upon all nations and his fury upon all their armies.’ ‘His sword descends upon Edom and upon the people he has devoted to destruction for judgement.’ “He has a sacrifice at Bozrah and a great slaughter in the land of Edom.” “For this is the day of the Lord’s vengeance, the year of recompense for the cause of Zion” (Isaiah 34:2–8). This judgement of the armies of the nations is carried out by the Lord alone: ‘No man of the peoples is with him’ when ‘he comes from Edom, from Bozrah, with his garments dyed red’ (Isaiah 63:1-3) (*).

(*) What we present here is the Jewish perspective on the destruction of the western armies in Edom, by the Messiah alone. In Rev. 19:11–16, we see him coming down from heaven, followed by the heavenly saints, and destroying these very armies with the sharp, double-edged sword that comes out of his mouth. These two perspectives are perfectly consistent with the nature of prophecy in both the Old and New Testaments.

It is only after the annihilation of the armies of the Western empire, and the destruction of their leaders, the Beast and the false prophet (Rev. 19: 19–21), that the Lord destroys, in the land of Israel, the entire army of the Assyrian, who has marched up from Egypt to seize, in turn, Jerusalem and Palestine (Dan. 11:44, 45).

The destruction of the western armies in Edom is not mentioned in the prophecy of Obadiah. We learn only that Edom itself is plundered and ravaged by its former allies who were at peace with it, and that a great slaughter takes place.

Edom has therefore been mistaken in its plans, so cunningly devised, yet all leading to its downfall because it attacked the

ancient people of God and the holy city at the very moment of their restoration. What use are its much-vaunted wise men to it now? ‘There is no understanding in him! ‘Is it not on that day,’ says the Lord, ‘that I will destroy the wise men in the midst of Edom, and understanding from the mountain of Esau? And your mighty men, O Teman, shall be terrified, so that every one shall be cut off from the mountain of Esau by slaughter’ (Obad. 8:9).

One might be surprised that this small nation of Edom, so insignificant, even when it is reborn in the future, should play such a great role in the history of the end times and even become the sole subject of a prophecy such as that of Obadiah. The reason is that, apart from Edom’s godless nature, its implacable hatred towards God’s people, and its ambitious plans to seize by force the inheritance of Israel and the city of the great King—that apart from all that, I say, Edom happens to be the focal point where the entire conflict of the last days will be resolved: the struggle between the king of the north and the king of the south (between the Assyrian Gog and Egypt); the struggle between the nations bordering Israel and Edom for

possession of the Lord's inheritance; the struggle between the Roman Beast, the Western Empire, and Gog over the possession of Jerusalem and the conquest of Egypt; in short, the entire prophetic history of the last days centres on this territory, when 'Jerusalem has become a cup of staggering for all the peoples'. — Once the Gordian knot of Edom has been cut, the coming of the Messiah dawns like a blessed dawn, heralding the sun of righteousness. All these end-time events turn our thoughts to the present conflict (*), the principles of which do not differ from those, and which could be a prelude to future events, far more dreadful.

(*) First edition 1915.

'Because of the violence done to your brother Jacob, shame shall cover you, and you shall be cut off forever' (v. 10).

'The arrogance of his heart' (v. 3) was Edom's first characteristic; the second is the violence done to his brother. The Lord, however guilty Israel may have been, does not forget that it is the object of His promises, and God is faithful to what He has promised. What affects His people affects Him Himself. In the

days of Israel’s unfaithfulness, He had to hide His face from the house of Jacob, but now the time has come when He can openly take up the cause of His people once more. In the last days of Edom and during the siege of Jerusalem by the nations, of which Edom was the leader, repentance entered the hearts of the Remnant, ‘and in that day the deaf shall hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind, delivered from darkness and gloom, shall see’ (Isa. 29:1–8, 18). Then the retribution of Esau, hitherto suspended to allow God’s judgement upon His people to run its course, will fall upon Edom. There will be no further forgiveness for the enemies of Jacob, the Lord’s chosen one. Edom will be ‘cut off forever’. Indeed, whatever prophecy concerning Edom one considers, the Spirit of God always concludes that nothing will remain of Edom as a nation. Its territory will be consigned to perpetual desolation: ‘I will reduce you to perpetual desolation, and your cities shall no longer be inhabited; and you shall know that I am the Lord. Because you have said, “The two nations and the two lands shall be mine, and we shall possess them”—and the Lord was there—therefore, as I live, says the Lord God, I will deal with you accord-

ing to your anger and your jealousy, just as you have acted out of your hatred against them; and I will make myself known among them when I have judged you. And you shall know that I, the Lord, have heard all your revilings which you have uttered against the mountains of Israel, saying, ‘They are desolate; they have been given to us to devour.’ And you have exalted yourselves against me with your mouths, and multiplied your words against me; I have heard it. Thus says the Lord God: When the whole earth rejoices, I will make you a desolation. As you rejoiced over the inheritance of the house of Israel, because it was laid waste, so I will do to you; you shall be a desolation, O Mount Seir, and all Edom; and they shall know that I am the Lord’ (Ezek. 35:9–15). God heard these cries of hatred, these insults against his people, and ‘the Lord was there!’ The height of Edom’s blindness! In the days when God turned his face away from the house of Israel, he gave free rein to Edom’s hatred; but when he reveals himself anew as Saviour to his repentant people, Edom’s judgement can no longer be delayed, for it fights against the people of the promise, whom the Lord himself defends! (*)

(*) This is not the case today, for the ways of the Lord, which have been interrupted towards the people of Israel, have not yet resumed with a view to their deliverance. Is there any nation whose cause the Lord takes up today? He may, according to His ways, grant supremacy or a momentary advantage to one or other of the warring nations, but none has His favour. All are inexcusable, and the most inexcusable of all are those who most loudly claim the name of the Lord, using that name to cover their injustices.

On this same future desolation, read again Isaiah 34:9–17. Edom will henceforth be the lair of every unclean, dangerous, and evil creature in creation. However sparsely inhabited this region may be today, its present fate is not the one Isaiah describes to us. We must ‘search the book of the Lord’ to know its final fate. Not a single harmful beast will be missing: ‘One will not seek out the other; for my mouth has commanded it, and my Spirit has gathered them. And He has cast lots for them, and His hand has divided the land by a measuring line: they shall possess it forever; they shall dwell there from generation to generation.’

In verses 11 to 14, the prophet Obadiah sets out the Lord's final grievances against Edom:

‘On the day you stood by and watched, on the day strangers carried off his wealth, and foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem, you too were like one of them. But you should not have looked on the day of your brother, the day of his disaster; nor should you have rejoiced over the sons of Judah on the day of their destruction; nor should you have opened your mouth wide on the day of distress. You should not have entered the gate of my people on the day of their calamity, nor should you have looked upon their misery on the day of their calamity; nor should you have laid hands on their wealth on the day of their calamity; nor should you have stood at the crossroads to cut down their survivors, nor should you have handed over those of their people who remained on the day of distress.’

It seems natural to apply this passage to the past history of Jerusalem, to the siege of that city by Nebuchadnezzar, and we see no reason to oppose this interpretation. God remembers the vi-

olence done to the adulterous city, yet in his counsels she remains ever the beloved. It is this day of Jerusalem that the captives remember, by the rivers of Babylon, when they say: ‘O Lord, remember the sons of Edom, who, on the day of Jerusalem, said: “Raze it, raze it down to its foundations!”’ (Ps. 137:7). It is to her that reference is made in Amos 1:6, 11, 12 (*) and perhaps in Joel 3:6. However, this passage applies with equal truth to the future siege of Jerusalem, mentioned in Psalm 83, and in chapter 14:1, 2 of the prophet Zechariah: ‘Behold, a day is coming from the Lord, and your plunder will be divided up in your midst. And I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem for battle; the city will be captured, the houses plundered, the women raped, and half the city will go into captivity; yet the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city.’ (**)

(*) See ‘The Book of the Prophet Amos’, by H. R.

(**) See also, for further passages, ‘The Prophetic History of the Last Days’, page 31, by H. R.

What has Edom been doing throughout its history, both in the future and in the past? This profane man seeks to acquire what

God has expressly denied him by bestowing the inheritance upon his brother Jacob, and he uses violence to seize it. Undoubtedly, Jacob had been unfaithful and deserved this judgment, but Edom, who in the past had been God's rod against Israel (2 Kings 8:20), pursues his own designs, completely alien to those of God. Could God revoke His unconditional promises? How much less so in the last days, of which Zechariah and other prophets speak, when, under the weight of judgments, a Remnant brought to repentance turns to the Messiah whom the people had once rejected? (Zech. 12:8–14.)

The passage between verses 11 and 14 of Obadiah may therefore recall Edom's attitude in the historical past and in the prophetic future as revealed to us. It even seems that the allusion to the latter is here in the foreground. This passage speaks of the day of calamity and the day of distress for Jerusalem. We have often pointed out that this latter term, in the Psalms and in the prophets, usually—perhaps always—signifies the 'great tribulation' of the end, also called the 'distress of Jacob'. Be that as it may, this passage speaks of a day that had already passed at the time of the prophecy, and which God has not for-

gotten. Nothing touches me more than this rebuke: ‘You ought not to have!’ (*). How mercifully these words ring out, just as judgement is about to fall upon this hardened nation! ‘You ought not to have!’ Ah! If you had not deserved this judgement, how I would have wished to spare you! Nothing shows more clearly that the Lord is slow to anger, that He seeks and would have desired to find some feeling of compassion, if only a shadow of pity, even in the worst enemies of His people. Such is the patience of God, such is the character of Christ. But no, Edom had pushed hatred and outrage to their very limits. Joining in the plundering, rejoicing in the calamity of the sons of Judah, opening his mouth wide to revile and curse his brother (cf. Ps. 35:21); seizing the city, plundering the goods, exterminating the survivors, selling as captives those who remained... Edom ought not to have done all these things; now it was too late!

(*) How much better is this version—adopted, moreover, by our earlier translators—than that of certain modern translators!

The same sentiment of merciful pity towards Edom is found in another passage: the oracle concerning Duma (Isaiah 21:11,

12). In verses 5–9 of this chapter of Isaiah, the Lord has set a watchman in Jerusalem to see what is to come. The watchman has a vision of the ruin of Babylon, indicating that the end of the dominion entrusted to the Gentiles is near. This vision is addressed to Israel, for whom it is intended. Behold, Edom mocks what the Spirit of God proclaims: ‘Watchman,’ he says, ‘what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?’ The watchman replies: ‘The morning is coming, and so is the night.’ The morning awaited by the faith of Israel is about to dawn, but so too is the night for the unbeliever and the mocker! ‘If you wish to inquire, inquire,’ adds the watchman; the certainty of judgement will not fail. Edom is therefore inexcusable for not having wished to inquire. Then it is said: ‘Return, come!’ Until the very last moment, God still leaves a door open to repentance. Is this not a moving word? How it harmonises with that of Obadiah: ‘You ought not to have... you ought not to have!’ Faced with Babylon’s sealed fate, why did you ally yourself with her? Should you not have separated your cause from hers and understood that I am restoring my ways towards my people, and that the fall of the empire entrusted to the Gentiles opens a new era

of blessings for Israel, which had rejected me, but which now 'has received double for all its sins from the hand of the Lord?' (Isaiah 40:2.)

Here is the era of blessings opening up for the people. This deliverance of Israel can only take place through a final and merciless judgement, following the refusal of all these nations to heed the words of grace offered to them: 'For the day of the Lord is near against all nations: as you have done, so shall it be done to you; your reward shall fall upon your own head' (v. 15). The calamity and distress of Judah and Jerusalem indicate that the day of the Lord is near. The day of the Lord signifies, throughout the prophets, the day of judgement that precedes the establishment of Christ's reign on earth. It is 'the day of the Lord' announced in the New Testament. After having fallen upon Israel in 'the great tribulation' of which the fall of Jerusalem forms part, this day must come upon the nations (with Edom at the forefront) that have caused suffering, tormented, enslaved and trampled underfoot the former people of God. Edom thus becomes the example of the fall of the nations on 'the day of the Lord', just as Babylon is the example of the col-

lapse of their empire to make way for the universal empire of Christ, the ‘great mountain that fills the whole earth’ (Dan. 2:35). This day will overtake not only Edom, but all the nations; it will be a day of retribution when they will be dealt with according to what they have done to God’s people. Edom’s reward will be the judgement that crushes it, but this judgement is universal, and the place Edom occupies in it serves as an illustration for all the rest (Isaiah 34:2; Obadiah 15–17).

‘For as you have drunk on my holy mountain, so all the nations shall drink continually; and they shall drink and swallow, and they shall be as though they had never been’ (v. 16; cf. Jer. 49:12).

These nations had rejoiced in their victory over Jerusalem, forgetting that they were on the holy mountain of the Lord, who had never forsaken his promises, despite his people’s disobedience. To God, Zion was still his holy mountain. Could he forget it, he who wished to ‘anoint his King on Zion, the mountain of his holiness’? What a desecration to come and get drunk in the

very place where the King of glory was to appear, when the gates would lift up their heads and the eternal doors would be raised to let him pass! (Ps. 24). Edom and Babylon had drunk there, but God was preparing for them, and for all the nations, a drink that would be unceasing and unrelenting. They would drink, swallow, drink, and swallow again the cup of God's wrath. They would vanish, utterly destroyed, as though they had never existed. 'I have understood their end,' says the Psalmist, as he enters the sanctuaries of God: 'Surely you set them in slippery places; you bring them down to ruin. How they are destroyed in a moment! They perish, consumed by terror. Like a dream, when one awakens, you will despise, O Lord, their image, when you awaken' (Ps. 73:17–20).

'And on Mount Zion there shall be deliverance; and it shall be holy, and the house of Jacob shall possess its possessions' (v. 17).

This mountain, which the nations—and particularly Edom, the 'unholy one'—had defiled, will no longer be a place of slavery and captivity, but a place of deliverance. Then it will be shown

that God can clothe it with holiness, despite all its defilements and those with which the nations had burdened it. How can Jerusalem, this defiled object, be made holy? Through the blood of Redemption and in the same way as each of us individually. True Israel will be redeemed forever by the blood of the Lamb, just as the people were once, as a type, redeemed from Egypt. It is also by virtue of the blood shed upon Zion, the mountain of grace, that the kingdom will be established in Jerusalem. Then ‘the house of Jacob (the whole of Israel represented by Judah) shall possess its possessions. Then shall be fulfilled that word which David puts into the mouth of Christ and into the mouth of Israel: “Upon Edom I have cast my sandal... who will lead me to Edom? Is it not you, O God, who have rejected us, and who have not gone out, O God, with our armies?’ (Ps. 108:9–11). On that day Israel will possess ‘its possessions’, will fully enter into its inheritance and into the boundaries which the Lord had assigned to it from of old (Josh. 1:4).

‘And the house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame; and the house of Esau shall be stubble; and they shall

set it on fire and devour it; and there shall be no remnant of the house of Esau, for the Lord has spoken' (v. 18).

Here we find the future union, foretold by a multitude of passages, of the two kingdoms, once divided following Solomon's unfaithfulness. The staff of Judah and the staff of Joseph, once separate, are now but a single piece of wood in the Lord's hand (Ezek. 37:15–17; Zech. 11:7–14). The house of Jacob (Israel represented by Judah) and the house of Joseph (Israel represented by Ephraim) will act in unison. They will devour Edom and leave no remnant there. This is the decree of the Lord against this profane people who have despised Him, against this violent people whose hatred towards their brother sought to seize the inheritance denied to them and to thwart God's determined purpose according to the election of grace concerning Jacob. This victory of the sons of Israel over Edom is described to us in Isaiah 11:13, 14. All the nations will in turn be plundered by the people of the Lord, Edom first of all. In Jeremiah 49, the captives of Ammon and Moab will be restored, but nothing of the sort will happen to Edom. The same will be true of the Phil-

istines, though perhaps to a lesser degree (Amos 1:8; Zech. 9:7).

The destruction of Edom by Israel must be distinguished from the judgement brought upon it by the Lord Himself. In Isaiah 34:1–8, He pours out His wrath upon Edom and all the armies of the nations, though Edom itself also has its share (v. 5). ‘This is the day of the Lord’s vengeance, the year of recompense for the cause of Zion’ (v. 8). In Isaiah 63:1–6, it concerns the armed nations exterminated by him alone on the territory of Edom. ‘The day of vengeance was in my heart,’ says the Lord, ‘and the year of my redeemed had come’ (v. 4). In Rev. 19:11–16, the Lord, coming forth from the open heavens, followed by the heavenly armies, is alone in striking the nations with the double-edged sword that comes out of his mouth. In Rev. 14:19, 20, the same vengeance falls upon the apostate Jewish people in Palestine. All these judgments are carried out by Him alone. His victory over the armies of the nations is followed by the judgment of the Valley of Jehoshaphat, executed by Him alone, a harvest and a vintage at the same time (Joel 3, cf. Rev. 14:14–20). Finally, in Matt. 25:31–46, all the nations are

gathered before the Son of Man, seated on the throne of his glory, and once again it is He alone who judges them individually according to the way they have treated his Jewish brothers, the messengers of the Gospel of the Kingdom.

The judgment of Edom by the Israelites is much more limited. It is of Edom that it is said: ‘I will stretch out my hand against Edom and cut off both man and beast from it; I will make it a desolate wasteland from Teman to Dedan, and they shall fall by the sword; I will take vengeance on Edom through the hand of my people Israel’ (Ezek. 25:12–14). In Obadiah, this judgement takes place exclusively with a view to the possession of the inheritance which Edom had sought to seize. All the references to the Maccabees, so often repeated by commentators who are unaware of the purpose and scope of the prophecy, are entirely invalid in the light of this fact. Through vengeance, all Israel recovers its inheritance when the day of the Lord dawns and the Messiah intervenes on behalf of his restored people. Thus: ‘The house of Jacob shall possess its possessions’ and ‘Those of the south shall possess the mountain of Esau, and those of the lowland the Philistines; and the sons of Israel shall possess the

countryside of Ephraim and the countryside of Samaria; and Benjamin shall possess Gilead' (v. 19).

Edom had seized the south, which was part of Judah's territory, during Judah's calamity. Now it is Judah—'those of the south'—who possess the mountain of Esau, that Mount Seir which God had once forbidden Israel to touch, when Edom opposed the passage of the people (Num. 20:21), and God's patience had not yet come to an end. The Lord had once pronounced certain blessings upon this people through the prophetic mouth of Isaac, but now the time for these blessings had come to an end; Edom was henceforth the property of Judah, a land, no doubt, forever desolate, but which remained on the earth as a witness to God's judgments against His enemies. Other nations will share in Israel's blessing, as it is said: 'Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance' (Isaiah 19:25); Edom will never be blessed. A similar fate befalls the Philistines. This perennial enemy of Israel, dwelling within its territory and occupying its borders, will not endure. It will form part of the territory promised by the Lord to Joshua, which the latter had not

fully conquered (Josh. 11:16, 17). ‘Those of the lowland shall possess the Philistines.’ This term seems to include Benjamin and not just Judah, for, according to the division of the land in Ezek. 47 and 48, Philistia will fall to these two tribes as an inheritance. Furthermore, Benjamin will extend, across the Jordan, as far as the territory of Gilead. Moreover, in these verses, there is no question strictly of a division, but rather of showing that from now on everything that stood in the way of the free possession of the land has disappeared, and that Israel forms a whole encompassing the enemy territories and joining up without interruption with the tribes situated beyond the Jordan, whose separate position had so often hindered the manifestation of the people’s unity.

‘And the captives of this army of the sons of Israel shall possess what belonged to the Canaanites as far as Zarephath, and the captives of Jerusalem, who had been in Sepharad, shall possess the cities of the south’ (v. 20).

The prophet continues here to describe the taking of possession of the land within the boundaries formerly ordained by God.

The army of the ten tribes, once carried away, will take possession of the territory from Sidon as far as Zarephath in the north. This region formerly belonged to the Canaanites and includes the territory of Tyre and Lebanon. Likewise, the prophet Zechariah, speaking of the return of the armies of Judah and Ephraim, says: ‘I will bring them into the land of Gilead and Lebanon, and there will not be enough room for them’ (Zech. 10:10). Finally, the captives of Jerusalem who had been in Sepharad (Sardis?) will take possession of the cities of the South. The return of these captives is described in a passage from Zechariah: ‘As for you too (Zion), because of the blood of your covenant, I will bring your captives out of the pit where there was no water. Return to the stronghold, captives of hope!’ (Zech. 9:11, 12). According to the same prophet, it is from this gathering that the Lord will raise up the mighty men who will fight with Him and whom He will make His steed of glory in battle.

All this is not, as in Ezekiel, a detailed description of the territory allotted to each tribe, but rather of the expansion of the people, so that the boundaries originally assigned by divine de-

crees—which, because of their unfaithfulness, they had never reached—may be definitively secured for them by God’s grace. This new conquest of His inheritance by the hands of His people Israel seems to precede the division of the territory among the tribes, and extends, as we see in this passage, to the South, the West, the North and the East.

‘And saviours shall come up on Mount Zion to judge the mountain of Esau’ (v. 21).

Who are these saviours? Zech. 12:6–8 provides us with information on this point. They are the leaders of Judah who, having devoured all the surrounding peoples on the right and on the left (see also Micah 5:5), become the judges and lawgivers of the nations. ‘On that day,’ says the prophet, ‘the Lord will protect the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the one who stumbles among them will be like David on that day, and the house of David will be like God, like the Angel of the Lord before them’ (Zech. 12:8). The battle will be followed by the government of the nations, exercised on earth by Judah the lawgiver, by Jerusalem, the house of David, and ‘the Prince’ (Ezek. 48:21), under

the glorious reign of Christ. These saviours, whose centre of government will be Jerusalem, will judge ‘the mountain of Esau’. The latter, the sole subject of the prophet Obadiah, is mentioned alone here, but as we have seen, this prophet regards it as the centre and representative of all the nations, gathering them together in the last days to face their judgement there. Once this judgement has been carried out, the centre of government is henceforth established in Jerusalem, of which Edom had said: ‘Raze it, raze it to its foundations!’

‘And the kingdom shall be the Lord’s’ (v. 21).

After the preliminary events set out in this prophecy: Edom betrayed by its allies of the day, whom it had hoped to make the instruments of its ambition; its devastation by these very allies who call upon the armies of the West for aid; the vengeance taken upon Edom by the now-united houses of Judah and Israel; the people of God and the armies, once captives, taking possession of all their inheritance; the establishment of the government of the nations in the city of the great King—all is now ready to receive him. The kingdom of Christ will not be

established suddenly, as by a dramatic turn of events, but through a series of acts determined in advance by God's wisdom, justice and mercy. Through these acts the Lord achieves His purpose: the work of repentance and restoration in the hearts of His people, the judgements upon the nations—a final appeal to their consciences—which become definitive when, God's patience having reached its limits, all His efforts have slipped away without making a dent in the hardened heart of man.

Dawn is about to break; the last clouds have vanished from the horizon; the sun of righteousness is about to rise upon the eternal hills; it rises, illuminating a vast landscape where all is ordered according to God's heart, under the sceptre of the Son at his right hand, where evil, barely manifested, is immediately suppressed; a glorious reign of a thousand years, filled with the presence of the Lord, which will precede the Day of God, the day of the new heavens and the new earth, where righteousness dwells!

