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Haftarat Vayishlach:
Esav: From Edom to Rome

Prologue
The book of *Ovadiah* is an anomaly among the books of *Tanakh*: It is only one chapter long! It is also anomalous in an additional sense: While we have few of the actual prophecies of such well-known prophets as Shmuel and Eliyahu, here we have the verbatim record of a prophet so little-known that exegetes cannot even agree on who he was or when he lived.

We shall attempt, first, to establish the literary and historical context of *Ovadiah*, and, in the process, make a significant point about the provenance of prophetic oratory. Following that identification, we will address the association between the prophecy of Ovadiah and the clash between Yaakov and Esav that evolves, typologically, throughout talmudic, midrashic, and medieval literature. Finally, two appendices will briefly examine the link between *Ovadiah* and proselytism, and between *Ovadiah* and *Birkhat Ha-Minim*.

Part I: Dating Ovadiah
Two views dominate the exegetical discussion of *Ovadiah*: Rashi and Ibn Ezra.

(a) Rashi shares the talmudic-aggadic view of Ovadiah:

> Why did Ovadiah [prophesy] uniquely on Edom and have no other prophecy? Our Sages said: Ovadiah was an Edomite proselyte (*Sanhedrin* 39b). God said, I shall undo them from within: Let Ovadiah – who lived among two wicked people, Achav and Izevel, and yet was not influenced by them – come and exact what is due from Esav – who [in contrast] lived among two righteous people, Yitzchak and Rivka, and yet was not influenced by them.

According to *Chazal* and Rashi, then, Ovadiah the prophet is one and the same as "Ovadiah the majordomo" of Achav (*Melakhim Aleph* 18:3), ruler of the Northern Kingdom of Israel c. 869–850 bce.

(b) Ibn Ezra, however, rejects this identification, arguing:

> We cannot say that he is the one mentioned in the book of *Melakhim* during the era of Achav, because that Ovadiah is called "God fearing," but if he were the prophet himself, how could he be called [only] "God fearing" and not "a prophet" since prophecy is the nobler of the two [epithets]?

Instead, Ibn Ezra offers an alternative identification:

> In my opinion, "We heard a rumor" refers to this prophet, Yirmiyahu, Yeshayahu, and Amos, who [all] prophesied on Edom. Hence the use of [the plural]: "We heard."

While Ibn Ezra's opening remark: "*lo yadanu doro*" – "we know not his era," indicates a reservation of some sort, it is clear, nevertheless, that he would have us situate Ovadiah within the larger historical context of the other prophets he mentions, all of whom lived considerably later than the Ovadiah of Achav. Yeshayahu and Amos were roughly contemporary (c. 750–700 bce), while Yirmiyahu was even later (c. 625–586 bce).

An Independent Approach:
We propose, here, to take an independent approach to determining the date of *Ovadiah*, which we will then merge with the exegetical record.

We will compare the text of *Ovadiah* with a very similar Biblical text and evaluate their correspondences, situating *Ovadiah* within the literary and historical context that both of these texts reflect.

The most striking correspondences to the text of *Ovadiah* occur in the book of *Yirmiyahu*, chapter 49.

ירמיהו פרק מט	עובדיה פרק א
(ז) לֶאֱדוֹם כֹּה אָמַר יְקֹוָק צְבָאוֹת...	(א) חֲזוֹן עֹבַדְיָה כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְקֹוָק לֶאֱדוֹם
(יד) שְׁמוּעָה שָׁמַעְתִּי מֵאֵת יְקֹוָק וְצִיר בַּגּוֹיִם שָׁלוּחַ הִתְקַבְּצוּ וּבֹאוּ עָלֶיהָ וְקוּמוּ לַמִּלְחָמָה:	שְׁמוּעָה שָׁמַעְנוּ מֵאֵת יְקֹוָק וְצִיר בַּגּוֹיִם שֻׁלָּח קוּמוּ וְנָקוּמָה עָלֶיהָ לַמִּלְחָמָה:
(טו) כִּי הִנֵּה קָטֹן נְתַתִּיךָ בַּגּוֹיִם בָּזוּי בָּאָדָם:	(ב) הִנֵּה קָטֹן נְתַתִּיךָ בַּגּוֹיִם בָּזוּי אַתָּה מְאֹד:
(טז) תִּפְלַצְתְּךָ הִשִּׁיא אֹתָךְ זְדוֹן לִבֶּךָ שֹׁכְנִי בְּחַגְוֵי הַסֶּלַע תֹּפְשִׂי מְרוֹם גִּבְעָה	(ג) זְדוֹן לִבְּךָ הִשִּׁיאֶךָ שֹׁכְנִי בְחַגְוֵי סֶלַע מְרוֹם שִׁבְתּוֹ אֹמֵר בְּלִבּוֹ מִי יוֹרִדֵנִי אָרֶץ:
כִּי תַגְבִּיהַ כַּנֶּשֶׁר קִנֶּךָ מִשָּׁם אוֹרִידְךָ נְאֻם יְקֹוָק:	(ד) אִם תַּגְבִּיהַּ כַּנֶּשֶׁר וְאִם בֵּין כּוֹכָבִים שִׂים קִנֶּךָ מִשָּׁם אוֹרִידְךָ נְאֻם יְקֹוָק:
(ט) אִם בֹּצְרִים בָּאוּ לָךְ לֹא יַשְׁאִרוּ עוֹלֵלוֹת אִם גַּנָּבִים בַּלַּיְלָה הִשְׁחִיתוּ דַיָּם:	(ה) אִם גַּנָּבִים בָּאוּ לְךָ אִם שׁוֹדְדֵי לַיְלָה אֵיךְ נִדְמֵיתָה הֲלוֹא יִגְנְבוּ דַּיָּם אִם בֹּצְרִים בָּאוּ לָךְ הֲלוֹא יַשְׁאִירוּ עֹלֵלוֹת:
(י) כִּי אֲנִי חָשַׂפְתִּי אֶת עֵשָׂו גִּלֵּיתִי אֶת מִסְתָּרָיו	(ו) אֵיךְ נֶחְפְּשׂוּ עֵשָׂו נִבְעוּ מַצְפֻּנָיו:
(ז) ...הַאֵין עוֹד חָכְמָה בְּתֵימָן	(ז) ...אֵין תְּבוּנָה בּוֹ:
אָבְדָה עֵצָה מִבָּנִים נִסְרְחָה חָכְמָתָם:	(ח) הֲלוֹא בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא נְאֻם יְקֹוָק וְהַאֲבַדְתִּי חֲכָמִים מֵאֱדוֹם וּתְבוּנָה מֵהַר עֵשָׂו:
(כב) ...וְהָיָה לֵב גִּבּוֹרֵי אֱדוֹם בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא כְּלֵב אִשָּׁה מְצֵרָה:	(ט) וְחַתּוּ גִבּוֹרֶיךָ תֵּימָן לְמַעַן יִכָּרֶת אִישׁ מֵהַר עֵשָׂו מִקָּטֶל:
(יב) ...הִנֵּה אֲשֶׁר אֵין מִשְׁפָּטָם לִשְׁתּוֹת הַכּוֹס שָׁתוֹ יִשְׁתּוּ	(טז) כִּי כַּאֲשֶׁר שְׁתִיתֶם עַל הַר קָדְשִׁי יִשְׁתּוּ כָל הַגּוֹיִם תָּמִיד
וְאַתָּה הוּא נָקֹה תִנָּקֶה לֹא תִנָּקֶה כִּי שָׁתֹה תִשְׁתֶּה:	וְשָׁתוּ וְלָעוּ וְהָיוּ כְּלוֹא הָיוּ:

The striking overall similarity, underlined by significant verbal and literary nuances, is highly reminiscent of the correspondences enjoyed by the texts of *Hoshea*, *Yeshayahu*, *Amos*, and *Michah*, four prophets who lived at relatively contemporaneous times.[157]

Logic dictates that just as the correspondences between *Hoshea*, *Yeshayahu*, *Amos*, and *Michah* are best understood as the result of their contemporaneousness, so should the correspondences between *Ovadiah* and *Yirmiyahu* be accounted for by the assumption that they were contemporaries.

Treating Similarities in Prophetic Literature

The assumption of contemporaneousness is borne out by a significant observation of Don Isaac Abarbanel (1437–1508) that appears, not coincidentally, in his commentary on *Yirmiyahu* 49:19:

> Behold! The text of this prophecy is the same as that of Ovadiah. How can this be? Did not our Sages teach that, "No two prophets use the same style"?
>
> Rather this means that the other prophets did not prophesy in the same manner as Moshe. For Moshe received, prophetically, from God, not the subjects alone but the actual words as well. Just as he heard them, so he wrote them, verbatim, in the Torah.
>
> Other prophets, however, in their prophecies, would see only the general outlines that God instructed them and they would transmit and record them in their own words. Consequently, upon witnessing the same phenomenon they would often knowingly phrase it in the same words and style as had been employed by other prophets.

According to Abarbanel, then, the fact that Ovadiah and Yirmiyahu utilized "the same words and style" indicates that they were "witnessing the same phenomenon." Just what phenomenon was that?

The Historical Context

If we knew nothing more about Yirmiyahu and Ovadiah than what we can extract from the two chapters we excerpted above, where would we place them chronologically?

The answer is: We would situate them in the context of a war that was being waged against Israel (וְנָקוּמָה קוּמוּ) in the course of which, Edom, shamefully disregarding its fraternal relationship to Israel (לַמִּלְחָמָה עָלֶיהָ אָחִיךָ מֵחֲמַס) joined in the attack on Jerusalem (בוּשָׁה תְּכַסְּךָ יַעֲקֹב),[158] (מֵהֶם כְּאַחַד אַתָּה גַם). Adding insult to injury, the Edomites joined in the celebration over Israel's defeat (אָבְדָם בְּיוֹם יְהוּדָה לִבְנֵי תִּשְׂמַח וְאַל), participated in the destruction of the walls of Jerusalem (הַפֶּרֶק עַל תַּעֲמֹד וְאַל), and stood at the crossroads to either kill the survivors (אֵידוֹ בְּיוֹם בְחֵילוֹ תִּשְׁלַחְנָה וְאַל) or to hand them over to their enemies (פְּלִיטָיו אֶת לְהַכְרִית) (צָרָה בְּיוֹם שְׂרִידָיו תַּסְגֵּר וְאַל).

Such events are consistent with the Biblical narratives of the Babylonian assault on Jerusalem in 586 bce in the books of *Melakhim* and *Yirmiyahu*, as well as with the poetic references found in *Eikhah* (4:22): "[God] will punish your iniquity, O daughter of Edom, He will uncover your sins," and, somewhat curiously, in Psalm 137 verse 7, "Recall, O Lord, on account of the Edomites, the day of Jerusalem; how they said 'raze it raze it unto its foundation.'"

We may then conclude this section by asserting that Ovadiah was a contemporary of Yirmiyahu, prophesying at the close of the era of the First Temple and may, like Yirmiyahu, have been an eye-witness to the Edomite perfidy he describes. We shall next observe how the Sages extended that perfidy through their identification of the destroyers of the First Temple with those who were later responsible for the destruction of the Second Temple.

Part II: Ovadiah, Esav, and Yaakov

"Saviors shall ascend Mt. Zion to judge the mount of Esau and sovereignty shall be the Lord's." (*Ovadiah* 1:21)

The Biblical and rabbinic worldview saw the elimination of evil as a necessary prerequisite for the establishment of the dominion of God. Just as that is symbolized in *Ovadiah* by Mt. Zion's (Israel's) judgment of Mt. Esav (Edom), so too, it is symbolized in Talmud and *Midrash* by the termination of the fraternal conflict between Yaakov and Esav.

The reunion confrontation between Yaakov and Esav narrated in *Vayishlach* – to which our text serves as a *haftarah* – triggered a clutch of historical and legendary associations for the Sages of the Talmud and *Midrash*: Yaakov

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[157]. The best known of these correspondences are those between *Yeshayahu* 2: 2 ff. and *Michah* 4:1 ff. The entire corpus of these correspondences is dealt with by Moshe Zeidel in his "Introduction to the Book of *Michah*" in the *Da'at Mikra* series and in a separate essay entitled: ארבעה נביאים שנתנבאו באותו הפרק.

[158]. Parallel evidence in the book of *Amos*, though telling, is less specific: אָחִיו וְשִׁחֵת רַחֲמָיו בְחֶרֶב רָדְפוֹ עַל (1:11).

as Israel and, subsequently, Judaism; Esav/Edom as Rome, Byzantium and, subsequently, Christendom. In light of this, it is not difficult to imagine the Sages considering the destruction of the Second Temple as a reiteration of the destruction of the First Temple and casting the Romans in the role of the Edomites. "Scripture named Edom, and history pointed at Rome. By the most elementary syllogism, the two became one." [159]

Rome:

The earliest explicit evidence we have for this association appears in the wake of the Roman emperor Hadrian's defeat of the forces of Bar Kokhba towards the middle of the second century ce. The Jerusalem Talmud reports (*Ta'anit* 4):

> R. Yehudah bar Ila'i said: Rabbi would expound on the verse: "The voice is Yaakov's voice but the hands are Esav's hands" [as follows]: The voice of Yaakov cries out on account of what Esav's hands did to him at Betar. [160]

R. Akiva, in designating Bar Kokhba the messianic king, invoked the verse: "*darakh kokhav mi-Yaakov*" – "a star will step forth from Jacob" (*Bemidbar* 24:17), whose continuation includes the prognosis: "he will annihilate the survivors of Ir." To the Sages, Ir, a city par excellence, was none other than Urbs Roma, the city of Rome, capital of the evil empire.

His disciples followed suit. R. Meir punned on the word ראמים (*Yeshayahu* 34:7, wild oxen) to produce רומיים (Romans)[161] and read רומי משא (Rome) for דומה משא (Dumah) in *Yeshayahu* 21:11.[162] Another student, R. Shimon bar Yochai, referring to "calling to me from Seir" in the same verse, designates Edom as Israel's final exile. More significantly, however, he is cited as coining a proverb:

> "It is a well-known axiom: Esav hates Yaakov." (*Sifrei Bemidbar* 69)

Other *Tannaim* adduced homilies supporting similar associations. On the Torah's description of an infant Esav as "*admoni*" – "ruddy complexion" (*Bereishit* 25:25), R. Abba bar Kahana states: "*kulo shofekh damim*" – "they are all bloodthirsty"[163] and R. Elazar bar Yosi treats the Latin word "senator" as an abbreviation for three Hebrew words: שונא, נוקם ונוטר (hostile, vindictive, and vengeful).[164]

Byzantium:

When the Roman Empire in the fourth century, under Emperor Constantine, adopted Christianity, the identification of Esav as Rome extended to encompass Byzantium.

A striking example of this identification occurs in a passage from the *Nistarot Shel Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai*, a medieval apocalypse, which has been dated to the era of the Arab conquest of the Land of Israel in the early seventh century. Here is the pertinent passage from that work:[165]

> The second king of Yishmael[166] will conquer all the kingdoms. He will come to Jerusalem and there he will bow [to the God of Israel]. He will wage war against the Edomites [Byzantines] who will flee before him, and he will rule stoutly. He will be a lover of Israel; he will seal their breaches and the breaches of the Temple; he will

[159]. Cf. Gerson D. Cohen: "Esau as Symbol in Early Medieval Thought," *Studies in the Varieties of Rabbinic Cultures* (Phila., 1991), 247.

[160]. Cf. the parallel passage in *Bereishit Rabbah* 65:21 (22). The anonymous "Rabbi" is generally taken to refer to R. Yehudah's teacher, R. Akiva.

[161]. *Pesikta De-Rav Kahana* (ed. Mandelbaum), 134.

[162]. *Yerushalmi Ta'anit* 1:1.

[163]. *Bereishit Rabbah* (ed. Theodor-Albek), 688.

[164]. *Op. cit*, 763.

[165]. **מדרשי גאולה** (יהודה אבן שמואל: ירושלים, תשי״ד), 189. Heinrich Graetz, however, situated the *nistarot* at the end of the Ummayad Caliphate, and Moritz Steinschneider – during the Crusades.

[166]. The simplest explanation is that the author of the passage is using "king" for "Caliph" and the second Caliph was Umar, who led the conquest of Jerusalem in 636 ce. According to Even-Shmuel, Muhammad was a king, but Abu Bakr was not regarded as an independent king, leaving Umar as second to Muhammad. According to Bernard Lewis: "An Apocalyptic Vision of Islamic History," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* XIII (1949–51), 308–338, however, this passage refers to Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan. [Lewis's position was accepted, inter. alia., by F.E. Peters: Jerusalem and Mecca (NY, 1986), 93.] Heinrich Graetz situated the *nistarot* at the end of the Ummayad Caliphate, and Moritz Steinschneider – during the Crusades.

excavate Mt. Moriah and level it all off; [he will summon Israel to construct] the Temple. In his days, Judah will be saved and the flower of the son of David will blossom upon it.

A similar identification is made in the liturgical poetry of that era. In a *piyyut* by Shimon bar Magus (Israel; seventh century), we find the following closing lines, which take Yitzchak's blessing to Yaakov (*Bereishit* 27:28 ff.) as a prophetic prognosis.

שָׁמַע יַעַבְדּוּךְ וְיִשְׁתַּחֲווּךְ בְּנֵי הָרְפָאִים

הֱוֵי גְבִיר עַל אֱדוֹמִים הַגֵּאִים

תֵּת אוֹרְרֶיךָ אָרוּר זֶה אִישׁ אֲגָגִי

וּמְבָרְכֶיךָ בָּרוּךְ זֶה אִישׁ יְמִינִי. [167]

> [Yaakov] heard, "they will serve you" and "bow before you" those apparitions
> "Be the master" of the arrogant Edomites.
> May "those who curse you be cursed" refers to the Agagite
> And "those who bless you will be blessed" refers to the Benjaminite.

Here, in addition to the "standard" identification of Edom with Rome, we are invited to make yet another insidious identification: Esav as Amalek. Just as Haman the Agagite [Agag was the King of Amalek during the reign of King Shaul (*Shmuel Aleph* ch. 15), who foolishly spared his antagonist's life] was brought down by Mordechai the Benjaminite [ostensibly, a descendant of Shaul], so will contemporary Edom be humbled by Israel.

The Holy Roman Empire:
Following the earlier paradigms of Edom=Rome and Edom=Byzantium, *Ashkenazi* Biblical exegetes in the Middle Ages identified Edom with the Holy Roman Empire.

> Rashi (France, 1040–1105), for instance, interprets *Eikhah* 4:22: "[God] will punish your iniquity, O daughter of Edom, He will uncover your sins" (see supra.), as follows:
>> Yirmiyahu prophesied about the destruction of the Second Temple, which would be destroyed by the Romans.

In the same spirit, Rashi also identifies the "fourth kingdom" of Nebuchadnezzar's vision (*Daniel* 2:40 ff.), whose downfall would usher in the Messianic Age, with Rome:[168]

> "In the days of these kings:" While the kingdom of the Romans is extant.

> Manoach ben Chizkiyah (Chizkuni; France, thirteenth century), who continued in the exegetical tradition of Rashi, notes similarly (*Devarim* 28:50):
>> "A nation of fierce countenance:" This is the Kingdom of Rome, to wit: "At the End of Days, when evildoers perish, there will rise up a king of fierce countenance."[169]

> Nachmanides (1194–1270), too, is heir to this exegetical tradition. Witness his commentary on *Bereishit* 47:1, locating his own contemporary situation within the typological framework recognized by Rashi in *Daniel*:
>> I have already noted (*Bereishit* 43:14) that Yaakov's descent to Egypt [foreshadows] our present exile at the hands of the fourth creature (*Daniel* 7:7): evil Rome.

While acknowledging the typology of Edom=Rome, Nachmanides seems somewhat ambivalent about the historical implications of that equation. On the one hand, he extends the equation backwards into an historical period that even precedes the birth of Esav! In commenting on the battle waged by Avraham against four Mesopotamian kings (*Bereishit* 14:1), he identifies the "מלך גוים," literally: "the king of the Nations," as follows:

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[167]. ירושלים, תשמ"ד) יוסף יהלום: **פיוטי שמעון בר מגס**.

[168]. Spanish and Oriental exegetes, on the other hand (such as Saadiah and Ibn Ezra), identified the Caliphate of Islam as the fourth kingdom.

[169]. Chizkuni is paraphrasing *Daniel* 8:23 rather than quoting it verbatim. The text actually reads: וּבְאַחֲרִית מַלְכוּתָם כְּהָתֵם הַפֹּשְׁעִים.

He was the king over various nations who made him their chief and officer. This is an allusion to the king of Rome who was set to rule over a city assembled from among many nations: Kitim, Edom, and others.[170]

On the other hand, he is critical of Rashi's blanket assertion of that equation. In the genealogical lists and "king lists" of Edom, he has the following to say about "*Magdiel*" (*Bereishit* 36:43):

Magdiel is Rome. This is Rashi's interpretation, but I find it unintelligible. If we were to say that it is a prophecy for the distant future, there were many kings who ruled over Edom until the Roman Empire. [Furthermore,] Rome is not a chieftain [of Edom], but a large, fearsome and extremely powerful empire, with no peer among kingdoms.

Epilogue:
The continuing association of the Biblical Esav/Edom with imperial Rome, classical Byzantium and the medieval Holy Roman Empire attests to the power of exegesis to transform the current and contemporary into the timeless and perpetual.

Here, to close the main part of our study, are the opening lines from a famous poem by Yehudah Ha-Levi (1075–1141) that reflects the status of the Land of Israel as part of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem. They indicate that even in countries ruled by Islam, the equation of Edom with Rome, and the anticipated destruction of Rome as the signal of the ultimate redemption, remained vibrant.

לִבִּי בְמִזְרָח וְאָנֹכִי בְּסוֹף מַעֲרָב

אֵיךְ אֶטְעֲמָה אֶת אֲשֶׁר אֹכַל וְאֵיךְ יֶעֱרָב

אֵיכָה אֲשַׁלֵּם נְדָרַי וֶאֱסָרַי, בְּעוֹד

צִיּוֹן בְּחֶבֶל אֱדוֹם וַאֲנִי בְּכֶבֶל עֲרָב.

My heart is in the East –
    and I am at the edge of the West.
How can I possibly taste what I eat?
    How could it please me?
How can I keep my promise
    or ever fulfill my vow,
when Zion is held by Edom
    and I am bound by Arabia's chains?[171]

APPENDICES
Ovadiah and Proselytism
Due to both the felicity of the name itself ("*oved-yah*" – "servant of God") and the talmudic tradition (see *Sanhedrin* 39b regarding Ovadiah's ostensible conversion to Judaism), as we reported at the outset, the name Ovadiah was frequently assumed by converts.

One such convert was born in the southern Italian town of Oppido Luccano in 1070, became a Catholic priest, and, in 1102, inspired by the example of Archbishop Andreas of Bari, converted to Judaism. From the Cairo *genizah*, which also yielded a copy of his "certificate of conversion" (issued by a R. Baruch b. Isaac of Aleppo), scholars have retrieved a most unique fragment in Ovadiah's own handwriting: the oldest known Hebrew manuscript with musical notations, based on the well-known Gregorian chants.[172]

Another Ovadiah corresponded with Maimonides, who wrote a responsum (*teshuvah*) to that proselyte advising him that – in spite of his non-Jewish birth – he was nevertheless entitled to recite the liturgical formula, "Our God and

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[170]. Kitim (כתים) is mentioned in *Bereishit* (10:4) as a son of Greece (יון). In Bilam's prophecy (*Bemidbar* 24:23), a fleet (ציים) from Kitim oppresses Assyria and Ever (before succumbing to destruction) and similar references to Kitim as either isles or fleets of ships appear in *Yeshayahu* 26:1, *Yechezkel* 27:6, and *Daniel* 11:30. Rashi and Nachmanides consistently identify the biblical Kitim with Rome.

[171]. Translation by Peter Cole: *The Dream of the Poem* (Princeton, 2007), 164.

[172]. Norman Golb: "The autograph memoirs of Obadiah the proselyte of Oppido Luccano" (March, 2004: http://oi.uchicago.edu/pdf/autograph_memoirs_obadiah.pdf).

God of our ancestors" since: "Whoever adopts Judaism and confesses the unity of the Divine Name, as it is prescribed in the Torah, is counted among the disciples of Abraham our Father, peace be with him."[173]

Ovadiah and *Birkhat Ha-Minim*

The association between Esav, Edom, Rome, and Christendom that we elaborated on above leads to the consideration that the blessing recited against heretics ("*Birkat Ha-Minim*") borrows from the language of Ovadiah.

According to the Talmud (*Berakhot* 28b), shortly after the destruction of the Second Temple, a blessing was inserted into the *Amidah*, the central daily prayer, condemning the activities of "heretics":

> Rabban Gamliel said to the Sages [in Yavneh]: Is there no one who knows how to formulate a blessing against heretics? Samuel the Lesser arose and formulated it.

While the precise literary formulation of that blessing has undergone considerable variation over the ensuing millennia, one enduring feature is the inclusion in the closing formula of the phrase: "זדים מכניע" – "Who subdues the insolent."

The link to Ovadiah is forged by his reference to: "זְדוֹן לִבְּךָ הִשִּׁיאֶךָ" – "your insolence has beguiled you" (v. 3; paralleled by *Yirmiyahu* 49:16, see above). The extended association of Edom with Christianity is reflected in the earliest surviving texts of the blessing in the liturgical rite followed in the Land of Israel and retrieved from the Cairo *genizah*:

> ולמשומדים אל תהי תקוה אם לא ישובו לתורתך, הנוצרים והמינים כרגע יאבדו, ימחו מספר חיים, ועם צדיקים אל יכתבו.
>
> בא"י, מכניע זדים.

The phrase also survives in the epithet: "זדון מלכות" – "insolent kingdom," used to refer to oppressors of the Jewish people, in general, but Rome, in particular.

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[173]. Isadore Twersky: *A Maimonides Reader* (NJ: Behrman House, 1972).