



Two aspects of salvation:

• The rescue of God's people

• The punishment and destruction of those who oppose God

Salvation has two aspects to it: the rescue of God's elect from their sins and the punishment and destruction of all who oppose God. Often in the Old Testament prophetic books the two aspects are intertwined and are seen as a single future-but-undated vision. We have seen exactly this phenomenon in Isaiah 61:1–3a (and in Jesus' use of the passage in Luke 4:16–22). From time to time the prophet's vision of the coming gospel will focus on this aspect or on that aspect. Sometimes the redeeming of God's people is highlighted. Sometimes the punishment of God's enemies is centre-stage. In Isaiah 59:14–63:6 the vision spans the ages. It began with Isaiah's own times, with its injustices and corruptions. It looks forward to a day which will include both favour and judgement. It will be good news when all of God's people are gathered into the heavenly Zion, but the good news will be even greater when evil is banished for ever. It is this last assurance that even the worst of God's enemies will be removed which is the theme of Isaiah 63:1–6.

• Edom, the most malicious of Israel's enemies – the descendants of Esau, Jacob's twin brother

• Refers to all who hate God

The most malicious and spiteful of Israel's enemies was always Edom, the descendants of Esau, the brother of Jacob from whom Israel was descended. The two nations were descended from two twins. They should have been the closest of friends (as Esau and Jacob were at the end of their lives if not at the beginning). But far from being famous for brotherliness, they were famous for their hate. 'Because of the violence done to your brother Jacob, shame shall cover you, and you shall be cut off for ever', said an earlier prophet¹. Here 'Edom' is a way of speaking of all of God's enemies. 'Edom' is not so much an earthly nation (it no longer exists!). It is the term that the prophet applies to all who hate God and his Saviour in the same way that Edom hated the promise of God in Israel.

¹ Obadiah 1:10

A mysterious figure will come to execute judgement

A mysterious figure ('Who is this . . . ?') will come to execute judgement.

¹Who is this coming from Edom, from Bozrah, with his garments stained crimson? Who is this, robed in splendour, striding forward in the greatness of his strength? 'It is I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save.'

• He comes from Edom

• Stained clothing from a fierce battle

A figure is seen coming from Edom, a nation which had always shown great hatred of Israel. Bozrah was one of its most prominent towns. This person has evidently been in a fierce battle. His clothing is stained. Yet he is royal and majestic. He has been doing the work of a king. He strides forward with obvious purpose and confidence.

• Royal and majestic – purpose and confidence

²What is the cause of your garments' being red, like those of someone walking the winepress? ³I have trampled the grapes in the winepress alone; from the peoples no one was with me. I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath; their blood spattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing.'

• Clothing stained with blood – he has been crushing his enemies

The clothing of the royal warrior is stained like that of a person who has been trampling grapes in a winepress (an area where grapes are crushed by treading on them with washed feet). But the stain is not grape-juice; it is blood. The warrior has not been crushing grapes; he has been crushing his enemies.

⁴For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and the year of my redeemed ones has come. ⁵I looked, but there was no one to help,

*I was appalled that no one gave support;
so my own arm worked salvation for me,
and my own wrath sustained me.
⁶I trampled the nations in my anger;
in my wrath I made them drunk
and poured their blood on the ground.'*

• He is the only Judge

Just as the Saviour is the only Saviour because no one can help him, so the same person is Judge, alone in his work since no one can adequately express the anger of God against sin.

• The judgement of God is good news – wickedness will not triumph

The Christian needs to insist that the judgement of God is part of the gospel, part of the **good** news. It is surely good news to be told that wickedness will not triumph. Edom was full of hate and malice and betrayal. The animosity of Edom towards Israel was rooted in animosity against the promises of salvation, destined to come to the world via Jacob, not via Esau and his descendants. The modern forms of 'Edom' are the same. But all over the Bible God insists that his salvation will reach all nations, and one part of the good news is the certainty that sin will be fully punished and finally exterminated.

• God's people might fall into wickedness, but they will survive, purified by the cleansing chastening of God

This is Isaiah's constant message. God's people might at sometimes fall into great wickedness, but they are allowed to survive. 'Unless Yahweh Almighty had left us some survivors, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah'¹. They are purified by the cleansing chastening of God, and eventually they are lifted up to be what they ought to be. But the persistently wicked will indeed be like Sodom and Gomorrah. They will be entirely overthrown. No surviving evil will be allowed. He that does the will of God abides for ever, but sin brings everlasting destruction. Rebels and sinners will both be suddenly broken. Those who forsake Yahweh will come to an end². 'The mighty man will become tinder and his work a spark; both will burn together, with no one to quench the fire'³. Those who refuse the redemption that the Saviour brings to the world find that God's judgement is sudden, disgraceful and eventually totally destructive. The persistent rebel destroys himself. The arrogance of man will be brought low and the pride of men humbled; Yahweh alone will be exalted in that day, and the nonentities will totally disappear⁴. Edom is doomed.

1:9

2:28

3:31

4:2:17-18

• Those who refuse redemption will receive God's sudden and destructive judgement

• Sin will soon be banished

God is still building his new Jerusalem. One day it will be visibly glorious. Even now our Lord Jesus Christ is leading us towards the city and we are enjoying its joys already! We live in the expectation that soon sin will be banished from this world for ever. God's anger against sin is good news indeed. It is the only hope we have of a cleansed and purified world.