

Ezekiel

Week 18

The Lord Acts for His Name

Chapters 35-36

Introduction

Having spoken of the restoration of the monarchy in chapter 34, the central feature of the Davidic covenant, Ezekiel now addresses the future of the land of Canaan, the central feature of the covenant with Abraham. The issue at stake between Israel and Edom is nothing less than the possession of the Promised Land. As in chapter 34, where the prophet begins by critiquing the existing bad situation and announcing judgment on it (the panel of doom), after which he announces a message of the reversal of the situation (the panel of salvation), so here first comes doom pronounced on Mount Seir, followed by salvation pronounced on the mountains of Israel. The judgment of Edom is a necessary prerequisite for the restoration of Judah.¹

Prophecy Against Mount Seir (35)

SEIR. The word *śē'ir* defines a mountain (Gn. 14:6; Ezk. 35:15), a land (Gn. 32:3; 36:21; Nu. 24:18) and a people (Ezk. 25:8) in the general area of old Edom. Esau went to live there (Gn. 32:3), and his descendants overcame the original inhabitants, the Horites (Gn. 14:6; 36:20; Dt. 2:12; Jos. 24:4). The Simeonites later destroyed some Amalekites who took refuge there (1 Ch. 4:42–43).²

35:1–4 The Edomites were descendants of Esau (Gen 25:25). Genesis 27; 32 reveals the enmity that existed between Jacob and Esau. That animosity was perpetuated among their progeny in spite of their personal reconciliation (Gen 33:1–20). The Edomites inhabited the region southeast of the Dead Sea and south of Moab around Mount Seir. Esau's descendants were known as a cruel (Amos 1:11–12), vengeful (Ezek 25:12–14), warring (Gen 27:40), idolatrous (2 Chr 25:14, 20), and proud people (Isa 49:16–17).

God was “against” them (Ezek 35:3) because they consistently took sides with the enemies of his people and even helped them in attacks against Israel (2 Chr 20:10). Therefore God promised that Edom would one day be desolate (see Isa 34:5–17; Jer 49:7–22; Obadiah) because of their implacable thirst for revenge against the Hebrews.³

The source of Edom's perpetual enmity toward God's people becomes clear in 35:10. The Edomites desired to possess the two lands of Israel and Judah for themselves and thus to reclaim by force the stolen birthright, in spite of the Lord's past presence there. This

¹ Duguid, I. M. (1999). *Ezekiel* (p. 404). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

² Thompson, J. A. (1996). *Seir*. In D. R. W. Wood, I. H. Marshall, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer, & D. J. Wiseman (Eds.), *New Bible dictionary* (3rd ed., p. 1073). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

³ Cooper, L. E. (1994). *Ezekiel* (Vol. 17, p. 309). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

ambition will be thwarted by the Lord's intervention to protect the honor of his own name, which was linked to the gift of Canaan to his people (35:11–12; cf. Ex. 32:11–14).⁴

Ezekiel enumerated at least five specific reasons for the judgment of Edom:

- First, Edom was to be judged for its “ancient” enmity against the Hebrews, still harbored after hundreds of years following the deception of Esau by Jacob (v. 5).
- Second, the Edomites had encouraged Israel's enemies to execute the Jews by the sword. They missed no opportunities to endorse and even to participate in attacks against Israel (v. 5; Obad 10–14).
- Third, their desire to possess the land of Israel was fueled by their feelings that the land still belonged to them because Jacob had obtained it by deception (v. 10; Gen 27:1–40). Because of these feelings God said they would be victims of bloodshed since they perpetrated bloodshed and violence against Israel (v. 6). So Edom was to be destroyed (v. 7), and the land, filled with the slain, would remain a perpetual desolation (v. 8). The cities of Edom would vanish, never to return (v. 9). The accuracy of this prophecy is confirmed by the absence of Edom from the family of nations and the desolation of the region they formerly inhabited.
- Fourth, the Edomites blasphemed the mountains of Israel by saying, “They have been laid waste and have been given over to us to devour” (v. 12). Their words were blasphemous because they disregarded Yahweh's desire for the allotment of the land to Israel.
- Fifth, they had spoken against God “without restraint” (v. 13). This spirit of defiance was the subject of Malachi's message and insight into the bitterness of the descendants of Esau (Mal 1:1–5). They exhibited an attitude of defiance that ignored God's will for themselves as well as for the Israelites.⁵

Prophecy to Mountains of Israel (36:1-15)

As a message to the “mountains of Israel,” it is the restoration counterpart to the judgment message of 6:1–14. As here (v. 4), the message in chap. 6 also is addressed to the “mountains and hills, to the ravines and valleys” (6:3, 6). It is a message of judgment because of Israel's idolatry at the “high places” (*bāmôt* in 6:3; cf. 20:29), the same word translated “heights” in 36:2. At these sites of pagan worship the people multiplied sins through idolatrous Baal worship.

The three accusations brought against the enemies of Israel in vv. 1–7 expand the ideas of 35:1–15. First, the nations and Edom had taken possession of the mountains of Israel (36:2–3, 5). Second, the nations and Edom plundered Judah and left the land desolate (36:3–4). Third, the nations and Edom ridiculed and scorned Judah (36:3–4, 6, 15). Edom is mentioned specifically only in v. 5, but the accusations are comparable to those of 35:1–15. The “nations” meant the Gentile nations, of which the most recent and cruel was Babylon. Clearly Edom is especially significant in 35:1–36:15 as “the epitome of nations that sought to overrun and acquire Israel's land for themselves.”

⁴ Duguid. 405

⁵ Cooper. 309–310

Within these verses are four promises to Israel regarding the land. First, the land will again be fruitful (vv. 8–9; cf. 6:8–10). Second, all the house of Israel will return and multiply in the land (vv. 10–11). Third, their return to the land will be permanent (vv. 12–14). Fourth, God’s people will never again be ridiculed and scorned (v. 15).

Ownership of the land was by divine commission. Every family was entrusted with a portion of land protected by the law of the Jubilee Year (Lev 25:8–24), when all property was restored to the original owner or surviving family. Thus the land was viewed as a divine stewardship. It was this reason, for example, that Naboth refused to sell his portion of land to Ahab (1 Kgs 21:3; Lev 25:23). In this way divine ownership of the land was acknowledged. When an enemy claimed possession of the land, they claimed ownership of what was not theirs to take. It was God’s land.⁶

The tribes of Israel were each given a portion of the Promised Land, though the priestly clan of the Levites was given God Himself, not land, as their inheritance (Dt 10:9; see note, Ps 119:57). Inheritance is an important expression of God’s graciousness in the OT. He gives lovingly and freely to His people as a father lovingly provides for his children. God’s chosen people are His portion and treasured possession (Dt 32:9).⁷

Historically, the mountains of Israel had not always been experienced as a land that “does flow with milk and honey” (Num. 13:27). Sometimes it had seemed to be, as the ten timid spies falsely reported, a “land [that] devours those living in it” (13:32). But just as this report was essentially false then, so also it continued to be false as it was repeated by the nations around Israel (Ezek. 36:13). The mountains of Israel, Israel’s heartland, would once again be a place of prosperity and blessing, experiencing the positive fruits of divine election; no longer would it be a barren and undesirable place, under God’s curse because of the people’s unfaithfulness to their covenant overlord.⁸

The Lord’s Concern for His Name (36:16-21)

God judged the Hebrews by dispersing them, a reference to the Assyro-Babylonian exile. But they were a reproach and profanation of God’s holy name because they made it appear that he had not been able to keep them safe (Ezek 36:19–20). Therefore God intended to restore them not because the people deserved restoration (vv. 21–22, 32) but for the sake of his holy name, that is, his reputation.

The Lord’s name also was an issue at times other than during the exile. Not only did the Hebrews’ idolatry defile the land, but it also profaned God’s name (20:39). The revelation of God’s name or character was a major aspect of God’s dealing with Israel from the beginning (cf. Exod 5:2; 9:16; Lev 18:21; 20:3; 22:31–33), and it would continue to be God’s concern (Ezek 39:7–8, 25; 43:7–9). Moses effectively used the appeal to God’s name and character to stay the judgment of annihilation upon Israel after the incident of the golden calf in Exod. 32:11–18. He gave the same appeal when the people chose not to enter the land of promise

⁶ Cooper. 311-313

⁷ Engelbrecht, E. A. (2009). [The Lutheran Study Bible](#) (p. 7). St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

⁸ Duguid. 406

in Num 14:13–19. The restoration of Israel would serve as a signal to the nations, including Babylon and Edom, that Yahweh was still in control and still regarded Israel as his people. God promised to reestablish his reputation, or “name,” among them.⁹

A New Heart and Spirit (36:22-38)

holy name. God’s name is a capsule-word for everything He is and has revealed about Himself (see notes, Ex 6:3; Ps 8:1). Its essential characteristic is “holiness,” i.e., transcendence above all limited human concepts, definitions, and comprehension. If His prime motive in rescuing Israel from exile is concern for His holy name, none of His fallen, rebellious creatures should presume to dictate to Him that His first consideration in saving them should be love and compassion (cf ch 20).¹⁰

But this act through which God’s power is demonstrated involves not merely bringing Israel back physically to the land but also a total change in their nature. His people must be redeemed not merely outwardly but inwardly, effectively. Israel will indeed be gathered and returned from the nations to their own land (Ezek. 36:24). Then she will be sprinkled with clean water, symbolizing her cleansing from all her past impurities and idolatries, the things that had made the land unclean (36:25). In a similar way, Leviticus 15 prescribed washing with water to cleanse that which is unclean.

This outward act of initiation is then followed by a deeper, internal change, whereby Israel’s heart and spirit will be made new. The “heart” and the “spirit” are the seats of thought and will from which actions flow. Unresponsive, unyielding stone will be replaced by warm, living, responsive flesh (Ezek. 36:26). That which has been defiled will be made clean. The Spirit of God, which brings life and power, will indwell them and create in them both the will and the ability to follow God’s decrees and laws (36:27). Then, finally, they will be fit to live in God’s land and be his people, and he in turn will not be ashamed to be called their God (36:28).

Then the Israelites will experience the blessings of the covenant, the fruitfulness of the land, rather than the covenant curse of famine that had made them a reproach among the nations (36:30). Such a salvation will not bring about pride in the renewed nation but rather a profound sense of shame, for they will realize that their salvation is not something they have merited or deserved in any sense. Rather, it is a free gift of sovereign grace. Nothing short of such radical divine intervention could have saved such a people.¹¹

In the Hbr of these verses, the Lord used the first person “I” a remarkable 34 times to affirm the certainty of His acts to His people (some examples of the grammar are obscured in the Eng). He emphasizes that His work is solely by grace.¹²

⁹ Cooper. 315

¹⁰ Engelbrecht. 1368–1370

¹¹ Duguid. 415

¹² Engelbrecht. 1368