

Ezekiel 35:1-36-15 “A Tale of Two Mountains”
Psalm 137
Romans 8

January 16, 2011

For the exiles in 586 BC, this message would have been hard to believe.

They had witnessed the utter desolation of the land –
the slaughter of their family and friends,
the destruction of the temple.

They had seen with their own eyes that God had abandoned them.

And as a new wave of exiles pours into Babylon,
word spreads of what Edom had done.

Edom had been one of the nations who had promised to help Judah against Babylon.
Moab and Ammon, Edom and Tyre, all had gathered in Jerusalem
to conspire with Judah against Nebuchadnezzar. (Jeremiah 27)

But then, when the moment of truth came,
Edom stood back and cheered on the Babylonians!

Remember, O LORD, against the sons of Edom, the day of Jerusalem,
when they said, “Raze it! Raze it to its very foundations!”

And now Ezekiel wants us to believe that God is against Mount Seir?
“Ezekiel – you’ve been saying for seven years that God is against Jerusalem.
And that we now believe!
But how can we believe that God will restore us?
How can we sing the LORD’s song in a foreign land?”

There is a reason why we have chosen a lament tune for Psalm 137.
Because even though it calls for God to bring judgment against his and our enemies,
Psalm 137 is a lament.
As long as God’s enemies have their way,
nothing will be right in this world.
As long as those who revile God, his people, and his land
are the ones whose voices prevail,
then our voices will be raised in lamentation.

Until the blessed man arises who will sit on the throne of the Ancient of Days
and judge the living and the dead.

Sing Psalm 137
Read Romans 8

1. Mount Seir Shall Know that I Am the LORD (35:1-15)

a. I Am Against You, Mount Seir... (v1-4)

¹The word of the LORD came to me: ²"Son of man, set your face against Mount Seir, and prophesy against it, ³and say to it, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I am against you, Mount Seir, and I will stretch out my hand against you, and I will make you a desolation and a waste. ⁴I will lay your cities waste, and you shall become a desolation, and you shall know that I am the LORD.

Back at the beginning of Ezekiel's ministry,

in Ezekiel 5:8 God had said to *Israel*

"Behold, I, even I, am against you."

And in Ezekiel 6:2, God had said,

"Son of man, set your face toward the mountains of Israel, and prophesy against them, and say, You mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord GOD!

Thus says the Lord GOD to the mountains and the hills, to the ravines and the valleys...

Wherever you dwell, the cities shall be waste and the high places ruined...

and you shall know that I am the LORD." (6:2-3, 6, 7)

"I will stretch out my hand against them and make the land desolate and waste" (6:14).

So in Ezekiel 5-6, God sent this message to Israel.

And now in Ezekiel 35, God sends this message to Edom – Mount Seir.

You might ask, why is this here – in the midst of the message of deliverance?

Why isn't it in the oracles against the nations?

Because Edom is not a normal nation.

Of all the nations, Edom is the one singled out for this special contrast.

After all, Jacob and Esau were twin brothers.

And before they were born, God chose Jacob and rejected Esau,

as God said to Malachi, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I have hated." (1:2-3)

In Ezekiel and Malachi, as well as Genesis and Romans,

Jacob and Esau are the case study in election and reprobation.

And as such, Edom is the archetypal reprobate –

the nation that God chooses to contrast with "my" land.

Malachi will refer to Edom as "the Wicked Land,

a people always under the wrath of the LORD" (1:4)

Ezekiel's point here is that while Israel has come under judgment for a time,

Edom has come under judgment forever.

Ezekiel 35:1-36:15 forms a single message with two parts.

In chapter 35, the message that once was delivered to Israel, now comes to Esau.

In chapter 36, the mountains of Israel that once were brought under judgment will now receive mercy.

But why will God do this to Mount Seir?
Why will God bring judgment upon Edom?

There are two reasons:

b. Because You Hated My People, I Will Make You a Perpetual Desolation (v5-9)

⁵Because you cherished perpetual enmity and gave over the people of Israel to the power of the sword at the time of their calamity, at the time of their final punishment, ⁶therefore, as I live, declares the Lord GOD, I will prepare you for blood, and blood shall pursue you; because you did not hate bloodshed, therefore blood shall pursue you. ⁷I will make Mount Seir a waste and a desolation, and I will cut off from it all who come and go. ⁸And I will fill its mountains with the slain. On your hills and in your valleys and in all your ravines those slain with the sword shall fall. ⁹I will make you a perpetual desolation, and your cities shall not be inhabited. Then you will know that I am the LORD.

Again, this is the language of Ezekiel's oracles against Jerusalem!

Fifty-five times Ezekiel has spoken of blood –

and most of it has focused on the blood shed by Israel!

But now God says that Edom will perish because of their hatred and enmity for Israel.

Never-ending judgment will come upon Edom

because of their never-ending enmity for Israel.

But there is a second reason for this judgment:

c. Because You Sought to Possess the Land, I Will Judge You According to Your Ways (v10-12a)

¹⁰"Because you said, 'These two nations and these two countries shall be mine, and we will take possession of them'—although the LORD was there— ¹¹therefore, as I live, declares the Lord GOD, I will deal with you according to the anger and envy that you showed because of your hatred against them. And I will make myself known among them, when I judge you. ¹²And you shall know that I am the LORD.

Back in Genesis 25, Esau had sold his birthright.

In Genesis 27, Jacob had usurped Esau's blessing,
and Isaac had told Esau,

“By your sword you shall live, and you shall serve your brother;
but when you grow restless

you shall break his yoke from your neck.” (27:40)

But in Genesis 32-33, Esau had surrendered his claim to the land.

Esau walked away from the Promised Land
and settled in the hill country of Seir.

But now, Esau's descendents see their opportunity!

Now they can keep Seir and *take possession of* Israel as well!

- *although the LORD was there* - !

This is the key point that Ezekiel makes.

Edom has not reckoned with Yahweh.

Edom has dealt shrewdly in earthly matters:

they sat back and cheered Babylon from a safe distance!

They played their enemies off against each other,

and have waited to make their move until the right time.

Now, as allies of Babylon,

they think they can take possession of Israel without danger.

But they have not taken Yahweh into account!

When you make plans,

don't forget to include God in your calculations.

Which, of course, creates problems for your calculations!

Because God is not calculable!

There is a reason why people sometimes think that God is capricious –
that God is random and unpredictable.

And the reason is because – from our perspective – he is!

Or to put it better: because *our perspective* is fragmentary and limited.

The reason why you never quite know what God is going to do

is because you don't see the big picture –

you only have a very small, narrow picture of what is happening.

Sometimes people say,

“I prayed – but God didn't do anything”

“After all I've done, God didn't keep his end of the bargain”

“If God was merciful and loving – then he never would have let that happen.”

If you leave God out of your calculations, he will upend your plans.

If you try to calculate for God, you'll get the wrong answer!

So what do you do?

Stop being so selfish!

Stop acting as though you are the center of the universe.

You are not God.

God is!

What would that have meant for Edom?

They should have been content with Mount Seir.

God had given them Mount Seir – he never gave them Mount Zion.

Notice the conclusion to chapter 35:

d. I Have Heard Your Revilings against the Mountains of Israel – and so I Will Make You Desolate (v12b-15)

"I have heard all the revilings that you uttered against the mountains of Israel, saying, 'They are laid desolate; they are given us to devour.'¹³ And you magnified yourselves against me with your mouth, and multiplied your words against me; I heard it.¹⁴ Thus says the Lord GOD: While the whole earth rejoices, I will make you desolate.¹⁵ As you rejoiced over the inheritance of the house of Israel, because it was desolate, so I will deal with you; you shall be desolate, Mount Seir, and all Edom, all of it. Then they will know that I am the LORD.

God hears the revilings of our enemies.

God hears the mockers who multiply words against him.

God hears the revilers who magnify themselves – who try to make themselves look big.

There are those who rejoice because the church is weak and helpless in our day.

They delight in the desolation of the church –

the desolation of the inheritance of our Lord Jesus.

But God hears.

And so while the whole earth rejoices, God will make the revilers desolate.

Please note that it is “the whole earth” that rejoices over the desolation of Edom.

Joy will come to the world through the desolation of Edom.

Remember that God’s promise to Abraham was that those who bless you shall be blessed, and those who curse you shall be cursed.

And in your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.

All the earth shall rejoice when God deals with Edom,

because blessing can only come to the nations through the seed of Abraham.

2. The Mountains of Israel Shall Be Delivered (36:1-15)

The chapter break is quite unfortunate here,

because 36:1-15 are intimately tied to chapter 35,

and are not especially connected with the rest of chapter 36!

Even the “and you” in 36:1 connects the two oracles.

The first part of chapter 36 uses the same language as chapter 35

to now begin to bring comfort and hope to the exiles.

And there are two parts to this oracle to the Mountains of Israel.

Verses 1-7 speak of what God will do to the surrounding nations,

while verses 8-15 speak of what God will do for the land.

a. The Mountains of Israel and the Nations (v1-7)

i. Because the Enemy Has Spoken Evil of You (v1-3)

Verses 1-7 consist of two prophecies to the mountains of Israel,
and one prophecy concerning the *land* of Israel.

Each of these three prophecies consist of two “words.”

Every verse from verses 3-7 begins with the word “therefore” –
the passage is designed to build logically from verse 2 through verse 7 –
each verse building on the one before:

¹*"And you, son of man, prophesy to the mountains of Israel, and say, O mountains of Israel, hear the word of the LORD. ²Thus says the Lord GOD: Because the enemy said of you, 'Aha!' and, 'The ancient heights have become our possession,'*

Notice the emphasis on the *word*.

The focus is on what is *spoken*.

The enemy has spoken evil –

the enemy has said “aha!” –

the enemy has said that they now possess the ancient heights.

And so *thus says the Lord GOD*:

³*therefore prophesy, and say, Thus says the Lord GOD: Precisely because they made you desolate and crushed you from all sides, so that you became the possession of the rest of the nations, and you became the talk and evil gossip of the people,*

It is precisely because your enemies have crushed you and made you desolate,
so that the nations took possession of you...

(who is the you here?)

The “you” is the *Mountains* –

God is speaking to the earth itself!)

ii. Therefore the LORD Has Spoken Against the Nations (v4-5)

⁴*therefore, O mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord GOD: Thus says the Lord GOD to the mountains and the hills, the ravines and the valleys, the desolate wastes and the deserted cities, which have become a prey and derision to the rest of the nations all around,*

The mountains have become desolate.

The creation itself has become empty –

returning to the *tohu vbohu* of the beginning –

the barren wasteland devoid of life.

But whereas the *tohu vbohu* was unformed and empty –

the mountains of Israel are malformed – desolate and deserted –

if anything, this is *worse* than the unformed creation,

because this is the wastelands of sin and death.
The mountains of Israel have become “an estate of sin and misery” –
an inheritance of death.

And so,

⁵Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Surely I have spoken in my hot jealousy against the rest of the nations and against all Edom, who gave my land to themselves as a possession with wholehearted joy and utter contempt, that they might make its pasturelands a prey.

The key here is right in the middle of the verse:

My land!

The nations have joined with Edom to give *my land* to themselves.

But I will not let their voices have the last word!

“Surely I have spoken in my hot jealousy”

God is jealous for his land!

He will not allow his land to remain in the hands of the wicked.

But remember what Paul says in Romans 4 –

that the promise to Abraham was that he would be heir of the earth.

The promised land in the OT was designed as a picture of the new creation.

As Abraham Kuyper once put it,

there is not a single square foot in all of creation of which Jesus does not say,
“this is mine!”

And as we in verses 6-7,

what God *says* will surely happen.

iii. And Because God Has Spoken, the Nations Will Suffer Reproach (v6-7)

⁶Therefore prophesy concerning the land of Israel, and say to the mountains and hills, to the ravines and valleys, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I have spoken in my jealous wrath, because you have suffered the reproach of the nations. ⁷Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: I swear that the nations that are all around you shall themselves suffer reproach.

Notice that here we move from the Mountains of Israel
to the *land* of Israel (including the mountains!).

The nations mock – the nations revile – God’s land –

but God will have the last word –

and his word will come in his jealous wrath!

God is jealous for his land.

Let me make one thing clear:
in verses 1-7, God is *not* jealous for his *people*.
God is not upset because the nations have mocked his people.
God is angry because the *land* has suffered reproach.

What has happened is that the *holy place*
has been defiled.
The place where God promised to bless his people
has suffered reproach.
And when you mock and revile God's holy place,
then you are mocking and reviling God.

Because – as 35:10 reminded us – the LORD was there.

But...

b. But You, O Mountains of Israel, Shall Be Restored (v8-15)

The word “but” is such an important word in scripture!
It signals all the most important transitions:
Adam and Eve were created good – but...
The sons of David were called sons of God, and shepherds of Israel, but...
We were dead in our trespasses and sins, but...

In Ezekiel 36:8
this “but” is not just about people.
It is about *the land*.

Verses 8-15 are addressed to the mountains of Israel.
to the rocks and the trees!

So far in Ezekiel 33-36,
God has not said *how* he will restore his people.
He told them in chapter 33, that if they repent and do what is just,
then they will live.
He told them in chapter 34, that *he* alone will rescue his sheep from the shepherds,
and he will restore the Davidic throne among them.

God will restore order and peace.
God will give them faithful leaders and will establish righteousness.

And here in chapter 36:8-15,
he says that he will restore the *land*.

i. Be Fruitful and Multiply: Inhabitants and Inheritance in the Land (v8-12)

⁸"But you, O mountains of Israel, shall shoot forth your branches and yield your fruit to my people Israel, for they will soon come home. ⁹For behold, I am for you, and I will turn to you, and you shall be tilled and sown. ¹⁰And I will multiply people on you, the whole house of Israel, all of it. The cities shall be inhabited and the waste places rebuilt. ¹¹And I will multiply on you man and beast, and they shall multiply and be fruitful. And I will cause you to be inhabited as in your former times, and will do more good to you than ever before. Then you will know that I am the LORD. ¹²I will let people walk on you, even my people Israel. And they shall possess you, and you shall be their inheritance, and you shall no longer bereave them of children.

Remember that the "you" here is the *land*.

The land shall be inhabited and will become fruitful.

The "tohu vbohu" – the barren wasteland –
will be filled with people and animals and all good things.

The uncreation will become a new creation!

Leviticus 26 had warned that if Israel rebelled, God's curse would fall upon the land.

But now, Ezekiel says that the curse itself will be undone.

God will "do more good to you than ever before."

And then *you* (the land) will know that I am the LORD.

And my people, Israel, "shall possess you, and you shall be their inheritance."

The last line in verse 12 sets up the final point:

"and you shall no longer bereave them of children."

One of the covenant curses in Leviticus 26:20, 22, was that the land would turn against Israel.

"And your strength will be spent in vain, for your land shall not yield its increase,
and the trees of the land will not yield their fruit...

And I will let loose the wild beasts against you,
which shall bereave you of your children
and destroy your livestock and make you few in number,
so that your roads shall be deserted..."

You know how that works:

earthquakes, fires, floods, famine, pestilence, disease, wild animals...

Some of you have been bereaved of children by these things!

And all of you have experienced alienation from the created order.

You have been attacked by dogs,
stung by scorpions,
stricken with disease...

the created order can be a hostile and dangerous place!

But God says through Ezekiel that he will restore the whole of creation.

But God says:

ii. The Reproach of the Nations Will Be Taken Away (v13-15)

¹³Thus says the Lord GOD: Because they say to you, 'You devour people, and you bereave your nation of children,' ¹⁴therefore you shall no longer devour people and no longer bereave your nation of children, declares the Lord GOD. ¹⁵And I will not let you hear anymore the reproach of the nations, and you shall no longer bear the disgrace of the peoples and no longer cause your nation to stumble, declares the Lord GOD."

The land of Israel has been cursed –
it has turned from its proper function of being a blessing
into its alien function of being a curse to its inhabitants.

Remember this!
Because God created this world as a blessing for man.
The proper function of the created order is to serve humanity and cause our delight.

But because of *human* sin [please note who started this!!!],
the proper function of creation has been turned on its head.

We have become alienated from the creation,
and so the creation turns against us and causes us grief and pain.

Ezekiel 36 is all about the restoration of the created order.
This is why we read Romans 8 earlier.
If the mountains of Israel longed for the restoration of the people of Israel
so that they might be restored to their proper function,
then the whole of creation longs for the revelation of the sons of God,
so that the creation might become what God made it to be.

You might ask, so, Pastor, what is the *application* of this?
What should we *do*?

Take comfort!
God will restore the heavens and the earth.
He will make all things new.
The day will come when the creation will no longer war against you!

You have God's promise in the resurrection of Jesus.
Because Jesus has been raised from the dead,
therefore you know that this day will come.
And you have God's guarantee in the gift of the Holy Spirit!
Because the Spirit has been given as the down payment of the inheritance,
therefore you know that God will bring it to its glorious completion!