EZEKIEL

Chapter 25

*A Prophecy Against Ammon*

**The word of the LORD came to me:  2 “Son of man, set your face against the Ammonites and prophesy against them.  3 Say to them, ‘Hear the word of the Sovereign LORD. This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Because you said “Aha!” over my sanctuary when it was desecrated and over the land of Israel when it was laid waste and over the people of Judah when they went into exile,  4 therefore I am going to give you to the people of the East as a possession. They will set up their camps and pitch their tents among you; they will eat your fruit and drink your milk.  5 I will turn Rabbah into a pasture for camels and Ammon into a resting place for sheep. Then you will know that I am the LORD.  6 For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: Because you have clapped your hands and stamped your feet, rejoicing with all the malice of your heart against the land of Israel,  7 therefore I will stretch out my hand against you and give you as plunder to the nations. I will cut you off from the nations and exterminate you from the countries. I will destroy you, and you will know that I am the LORD.’”**

**25:1–32:32**† Oracles against the nations. Frequently in the prophets, God’s word of judgment on Israel is accompanied by oracles of judgment on the nations. These make clear that, while judgment begins “with the family of God” (1Pe 4:17), the pagan nations would not escape God’s wrath. No nation will be able to thwart God’s plan to use the descendants of Abraham in bringing salvation to the ends of the earth (Ge 12:3). In the case of Ezekiel there are seven oracles (the seventh of which has seven parts, each introduced by the phrase “The word of the Lord came to me”; see Introduction: Outline). (CSB)

**25:2** *set your face.* See note on 20:46. (CSB)

 *Ammonites.* Ammon (part of modern Jordan) was immediately east of Israel (see 21:20; see also Jer 9:26; 49:1–6; Am 1:13–15; Zep 2:8–11). For hostile Ammonite action during this time and later see 2Ki 24:2; Ne 4:7. (CSB)

The special attention paid to Ammon is undoubtedly related to the long history of conflict between it and Israel, even though historically the Ammonites, like the Moabites, were related to the Israelites via descent from Lot (Gen 19:36–38). The conflict was exacerbated by the fact that the Ammonites’ territory was poorly defined, although it apparently centered somewhat around the modern capital of Jordan—the city of Amman, which still bears the ancient name. The tribal list of Josh 13:15–20 assigns to the Israelites most of the territory north of the Arnon River (Gilead and Bashan to Mount Hermon) that the Israelites had conquered from the Amorite kingdoms of Sihon and Og (Num 21:10–35; 32:33–42). Moab had once possessed part of Sihon’s territory north of the Arnon, which probably explains later conflicts between Moab and Gad, which received part of Gilead north of Reuben’s allotment. (CC)

**25:3** *Aha!* A cry of malicious joy (cf. 26:2; 36:2; Ps 35:21–25). (CSB)

What is exegetically significant, however, is that Ezekiel makes no mention of all this political and military intrigue swirling about him. Rather, the concern is theological. Ammon takes malicious delight, not only in Jerusalem’s fall and the deportation of its inhabitants, but specifically in the profanation of Yahweh’s מִקְרָּשׁ, “sanctuary” (25:3). In Ammon, the virtual identification of god(s), temple, and nation would hardly have differed enough from Judah’s that the Ammonites would have failed to grasp the centrality of the Jerusalem temple in the official theology of the nation. Thus Ammon’s glee was virtually explicit applause that Yahweh’s own salvific purposes seemed to have been thwarted. Yahweh himself was being mocked. (cc)

**25:4** *people of the East.* Probably nomadic tribes of the desert east of Ammon, though this could be a reference to Nebuchadnezzar and his army (see 21:31). (CSB)

The punishment will consist of Ammonite loss of title to the land they had received from Yahweh. The Ammonites will be weakened to the extent that the nomadic tribes to the east will find it easy to move in and help themselves to Ammon’s land and property. This prophecy was fulfilled shortly after Nebuchadnezzar’s 582 invasion and depopulation of the territory, which effectively terminated Ammonite identity. Jer 49:6 holds out hope of ultimate restoration for the Ammonites, but Ezekiel does not mention it. All evidence indicates that it was several centuries before “civilization” in its sense of central authority returned to the area. Judas Maccabaeus is reported to have waged war against the Ammonites in the second century b.c. (1 Macc 5:6), and even Justin Martyr in the second century a.d. mentions them, but it is unclear whether these references are to a resurgence of the ancient nation or are more generally to whatever inhabitants lived in the territory still known by the ancient name. (CC)

As I can personally attest, as late as 1950, Amman was little more than a large village centered around the headwaters of the Jabbok at what is today known as the First Circle of a vast metropolis. For many centuries preceding, the Ottoman Turks had concerned themselves with little more than keeping open the pilgrimage route to Mecca. The proverbial conflict between “the desert and the sown” overstates the case. More often, as today with a strong central government, the nomadic and sedentary components of the society coexist in a generally peaceful, symbiotic relationship. But the climate and territory are such that in times of political weakness, the inhabitants find it relatively easy to revert to a nomadic way of life, and/or desert elements that had been held at bay sweep in and take control. (CC)

**25:5** *Rabbah.* See note on 21:20. (CSB)

 *pasture … resting place.* A common OT description for destroyed cities (see Isa 34:13–15; Zep 2:13–15). The sites were returned to the conditions they were in before the cities were built, representing the undoing of human efforts. (CSB)

**25:6-7** These verses could be considered a second oracle against Ammon, but it has extremely close links with the preceding verses: the continuation of masculine constructions, the connecting כִּי (“for”) beginning 25:6, and essential similarity in content. Both the initial citation formula (“thus says the Lord Yahweh”) and the concluding recognition formula (“you will know that I am Yahweh”) are repeated (from 25:3 and 25:5, respectively), but are also emphatic. The language is less concrete than in the previous verses, but also more intense in its prophecy of judgment: Ammon will even be “exterminated” (25:7). As noted above, this prophecy was fulfilled in Nebuchadnezzar’s 582 campaign in the region, after which Ammon as a distinct nation or people is heard from no more. (CC)

**25:6** *clapped your hands.* See 6:11 and note. (CSB)

**25:7** *I will stretch out my hand against.* See note on 6:14. (CSB)

 *plunder to the nations.* Cf. 26:5; 34:28. (CSB)

 *cut you off.* Cf. v. 16. (CSB)

*A Prophecy Against Moab*

**8 “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: ‘Because Moab and Seir said, “Look, the house of Judah has become like all the other nations,”  9 therefore I will expose the flank of Moab, beginning at its frontier towns—Beth Jeshimoth, Baal Meon and Kiriathaim—the glory of that land.  10 I will give Moab along with the Ammonites to the people of the East as a possession, so that the Ammonites will not be remembered among the nations;  11 and I will inflict punishment on Moab. Then they will know that I am the LORD.’”**

**25:8** *Moab.* Immediately to the south of Ammon, east of the Dead Sea (see Isa 15–16; Jer 48; Am 2:1–3; Zep 2:8–11). (CSB)

 *Seir.* Edom, a country south of Moab and south of the Dead Sea (see ch. 35, especially v. 15; 36:5; Isa 34:5–17; 63:1–6; Jer 49:7–11; Am 1:11–12). (CSB)

 *like all the other nations.* Israel wanted to be like the nations (see 20:32 and note), but when the nations saw Judah in her apparent vulnerability and lost their awe of her, they failed to take her God seriously (cf. La 4:12). (CSB)

With this verse, an oracle against Moab commences. Genealogically a “brother” of Ammon (Gen 19:36–38), Moab is treated in this oracle almost as an adjunct of Ammon, which is specifically mentioned twice again in Ezek 25:10. Moab’s relations with Israel and Judah closely paralleled Ammon’s, and the specific judgments pronounced upon the Moabites are very similar to those upon the Ammonites. (CC)

Like Ammon, Moab’s relations with the Israelites had been unfriendly from first contacts. Moab did everything in its power to foil Israelite attempts to invade Canaan—the subject of the Balak-Balaam narratives in Numbers 22–25. During the period of the judges, Eglon, king of Moab, gained some political control over Israel, with deliverance coming only through the daring feat of Ehud (Judg 3:12–30). The book of Ruth indicates that at least a truce obtained for a time then, but not long afterwards David conquered the land, dealing very harshly with it (2 Sam 8:2). In the ninth century, Mesha regained control of the Mishor, the Moabite plateau north of the Arnon that was also claimed by the tribe of Reuben (2 Kings 1–3; see also the famous Mesha Inscription, also known as the Moabite Stone). 2 Chr 20:1–30 reports how Moab joined Ammon and Edom in an unsuccessful attack against Judah. The prophet Elisha is involved in various skirmishes with Moab, one concluding mysteriously with Israelite withdrawal after the Moabite king sacrifices his oldest son on the city wall, “and there came great wrath upon Israel” (2 Ki 3:27). 2 Ki 13:20 reports Moabite raids into Israel the year that prophet died. (CC)

In Ezekiel’s day, Moab had joined Ammon in aiding Nebuchadnezzar’s attack on Jehoiakim, then both had reversed fields and joined Zedekiah’s coalition against Babylon. When Jerusalem fell, both taunted the stricken city, as intimated here in Ezekiel and referred to elsewhere (Jer 48:26–35; cf. Zeph 2:8). Finally, when both rebelled against Babylon in 582, both were all but erased from history by Nebuchadnezzar, Moab apparently sooner and more thoroughly than Ammon. (CC)

Ezekiel’s oracle against Moab uses the third person rather than the second person of direct address employed for Ammon. Moab is not described as indulging in open celebration of Jerusalem’s fall, but of using it as proof that Judah enjoyed no special status with heavenly powers, as it claimed, but was as vulnerable as all other nations. Some Hebrew manuscripts and the LXX have “the house of *Israel and* Judah” in 25:8, adding “Israel” in its theological sense as the covenanted people. This addition neutralizes the danger that “the house of Judah,” used by the Moabites, might be misunderstood in purely political terms. It is accurate theologically: despite Moab’s claim, the northern tribes too were not like other nations. The fact that Yahweh had indeed given his people a special status is linked to the incomparability of Yahweh himself. Thus Moab’s language is simple blasphemy. (CC)

**25:9** *flank of Moab.* Lower hills rising from the Dead Sea, visible from Jerusalem. (CSB)

 *Beth Jeshimoth.* A town in the plains of Moab. (CSB)

 *Baal Meon.* A major Moabite town mentioned in an inscribed monument of Mesha, king of Moab (see chart on “Ancient Texts Relating to the OT”). (CSB)

 *Kiriathaim.* A city also mentioned in the Mesha inscription (cf. 2Ki 3:4–5). (CSB)

Yahweh does not tolerate such blasphemous denials of his intrinsic uniqueness and incomparability and turns the tables. Like all the other kingdoms of this world, Moab must ultimately sink into oblivion. (CC)

*A Prophecy Against Edom*

**12 “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: ‘Because Edom took revenge on the house of Judah and became very guilty by doing so,  13 therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will stretch out my hand against Edom and kill its men and their animals. I will lay it waste, and from Teman to Dedan they will fall by the sword.  14 I will take vengeance on Edom by the hand of my people Israel, and they will deal with Edom in accordance with my anger and my wrath; they will know my vengeance, declares the Sovereign LORD.’”**

**25:12** *Edom.* See note on v. 8. (CSB)

Edom runs a close second to Babylon, especially in the OT, as *the* symbol and type of the kingdoms of this world—of Satan’s realm, which will be in unending conflict with the kingdom of God until the end of time. (CC)

The mutual enmity seems especially bitter because of the familial relationship between Edom and Israel. As is often the case, few feuds and grudges are as sharp and implacable as those between siblings. Jacob and Esau (the father of the Edomites) were twin sons of Isaac and Rebekah, and their rivalry, which will become one of the better-known narratives of the Bible, is foretold already at their birth (Gen 25:23). Genesis 32–33 indicates that Esau had settled in Edom already at the time of Jacob’s return from Haran. Gen 36:31–39 reports that eight kings had already ruled in Edom before Saul became Israel’s first. En route from Egypt to Canaan, Moses appeals in vain to the Edomites’ relation as brothers for permission to traverse their territory (Num 20:14–21). Because of the relationship, Deut 23:7–8 even permits Israelites to intermarry with Edomites in the third generation. Closer to Ezekiel’s time, both Amos and Obadiah highlight Edom’s malicious behavior toward its brother. And the reader will not overlook that after the short oracle against Edom here, an entire chapter (Ezekiel 35) will be devoted to the coming judgment on Edom. (CC)

No written Edomite records have survived or been found (presuming there were some). For their history we are largely dependent on Israel’s records in the inspired Scriptures. They indicate that relations between the two neighbors first became bitter when David conquered Edom and massacred many (2 Sam 8:13–14), although Edom was able to regain some independence under Solomon (1 Ki 11:14–22). The prize was the Gulf of Aqaba seaport of Ezion-geber and/or Elath, and its control of trade routes, especially those between the Hejaz (western Saudi Arabia) and southern Sinai. A seesaw struggle continued until the time of Ahaz in the eighth century, after which Edom prevailed, although by this time as a vassal of Assyria. Initially, Edom joined Zedekiah’s conspiracy against Nebuchadnezzar (Jer 27:3), but after Jerusalem fell Edom aided in the spoliation of the fallen city. It is especially this treachery which triggered the outrage expressed in Obad 11–14; Ps 137:7; and Lam 4:21. (CC)

 *took revenge.* By not harboring Judah’s refugees after 586 b.c. (see Ob 11–14). (CSB)

**25:13** *Teman.* A district near Petra in central Edom (see Jer 49:7, 20; Am 1:12; Ob 9; Hab 3:3). (CSB)

 *Dedan.* A tribe and territory in southern Edom (see 27:20; 38:13; Isa 21:13; Jer 49:8). (CSB)

Yahweh’s judgment is syntactically divisible into four declarations but may be summarized as consisting in depopulation and desolation, corresponding to the assonance of the two key words, חֶרֶב, “sword,” and חָרְבָּה, “wasteland.” (CC)

**25:14** The punishment corresponds to the crime in the sense that Edom’s vengeance triggers Yahweh’s vengeance. See the commentary on 25:12 for the different connotations with human and divine subjects. (See also the reversal described in Obad 15 and 18.) More remarkable is the assertion that Yahweh will accomplish this through the agency of Israel. The pronominal suffix on עַמִּ֣י, “*my* people,” repeated with כְּאַפִּ֖י וְכַחֲמָתִ֑י, “with *my* anger and with *my* wrath,” indicates that the prophet has more in mind than merely another round in an unending tit-for-tat human conflict. The suffix also suggests a time when God’s covenant with Israel will be restored as before, even greater (see 16:60–62; 34:25; 37:26). The thrust of Ezekiel’s thought is furthered by the transformation of the concluding recognition formula (25:7, 11) from a mere recognition of the person of Yahweh in general into a prediction that the Edomites will recognize Yahweh’s avenging judgment in the actions of the Israelites (25:14). And the standard signatory formula, “says the Lord Yahweh,” seals further the certainty of the fulfillment of the divine purpose. (CC)

*A Prophecy Against Philistia*

**15 “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: ‘Because the Philistines acted in vengeance and took revenge with malice in their hearts, and with ancient hostility sought to destroy Judah,  16 therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am about to stretch out my hand against the Philistines, and I will cut off the Kerethites and destroy those remaining along the coast.  17 I will carry out great vengeance on them and punish them in my wrath. Then they will know that I am the LORD, when I take vengeance on them.’”**

**25:15** *Philistines.* Inhabitants of the coastal plain along the Mediterranean west of Judah (1Sa 6:17), who strove for control of Canaan until subdued by David. Their hostility to Israel continued, however (see Isa 14:29–31; Jer 47; Am 1:6–8; Zep 2:4–7), until Nebuchadnezzar deported them. (CSB)

The inclusion of the Philistines is a bit puzzling in the absence of any overt conflicts between them and Jerusalem at Ezekiel’s time. Perhaps it made for a traditional foursome: already Is 11:14 had included the Philistines with Edom, Moab, and Ammon as enemies whom Israel would attack and overcome after its dispersion was over. The ultimate origin of the Philistines is probably irrelevant here, but they are usually associated with the Sea Peoples, as the Egyptians called them, who wreaked havoc in the Levant and beyond in the thirteenth century b.c. The Bible (Amos 9:7) specifies Caphtor (usually identified with Crete) as the place of their origin. But the Table of Nations (Gen 10:14; 1 Chr 1:12) classifies them as Hamitic, leading many to hypothesize an earlier migration from Egypt to Crete. Excavations, both at Knossos in Minoan Crete and at Tell el–Dabʿa (probably ancient Avaris) in the eastern delta region of Egypt, attest to extensive cultural contacts. But Minoan influence is also evident at Tel Kabri in northern Israel (Galilee). (CC)

**25:16** *Kerethites.* Related to, if not identical with, the Philistines (see 1Sa 30:14 and note; 2Sa 8:18; 15:18; 20:7). (CSB)

 *coast.* Of the Mediterranean. (CSB)

By a triad of verbs we have seen associated previously (25:7), “stretch out my hand against,” “cut off,” and “destroy,” God’s justice on the Philistines is described. The use of שְׁאֵרִית (“remnant”) may imply his will toward total elimination. (CC)

**25:17** Since a translation of בְּתוֹכְח֖וֹת חֵמָ֑ה, “with furious chastisements,” is missing in the LXX the phrase is often considered a gloss, but it is typical of Ezekiel’s expansiveness and seems especially appropriate in the conclusion. (CC)